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БЕСПРЕДЕЛ

Igor Bunich

UNLIMITED. Novel

Part 1

I

In recent days, our embassy in Moscow has resembled the headquarters of an occupying army, hastily deployed in the captured capital of an unexpectedly capitulated enemy. Although all the decades since the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, we have been preparing for this, events, as usual, took us completely by surprise.

The huge Soviet empire, armed to the teeth, driven into an economic impasse and torn apart by internal problems, collapsed and fell apart so quickly and suddenly that even the analysts from the CIA and the State Department who predicted this event could not recover from amazement and horror. A group of international gangsters, called the CPSU, disappeared from the world scene with the swiftness of a fabulous cat, chased by the ghosts of the mice he had eaten, leaving only a dirty scum of obvious psychopaths and criminals on the surface, naturally taking with them the entire gold and foreign exchange reserves of the dead empire. .

The fragments of the empire, like the rings of Saturn, swirled in a whirlpool of economic and political chaos, still local armed conflicts and ethnic massacres. Our ambassador did not sleep for days, spending most of his time in the Kremlin, drawing up lists of the government together with the President, instructing and advising new banking and commercial structures, negotiating for hours with the Secretary of State and the President, writing out a whole army of advisers and businessmen from the States, organizing food and other humanitarian aid in order to somehow alleviate the desperate situation in which (how many times already!) The unfortunate population of Russia has fallen.

Prices on the ruins of the empire, needless to say, jumped a thousand times on average, the ruble became nothing, and dollars could buy everyone wholesale and retail. It was a time of unprecedented triumph for our country, the United States of America. Our main potential adversary collapsed and, lying in the mud among the ruins of his own unfulfilled ambitions, appealed to us for help and mercy.

Unfortunately, we did not have time to feel like victors. If the ambassador did not sleep for days, then we, a small group of employees of the CIA station in the former Soviet Union, also, to put it mildly, did not sit idle, although we had to deal with issues that were never even supposed to be within our competence when we were sent work in Moscow. We ensured the security of Russia's new democratic leaders, tracked underground political and commercial structures, directed the police at the most notorious mafia groups and clans, working in full and open contact with the KGB. First of all, we demanded to provide us with a diagram

listening devices, which they once built into the walls of our embassy building. The KGB meekly obeyed. And then we believed that the Third World War had been won, and a new era had indeed begun, in which our great country became the only superpower.

But our main problem was quite different.

On the ruins of the collapsed communist empire, as if nothing had happened, the giant military factories of that monstrous military-industrial complex, which was created by the communists in the name of realizing their crazy ideas of world domination, continued to work. Factories continued to flood the unfortunate country with their products - from ballistic missiles with multiple warheads to micronuclear cartridges for the Kalashnikov assault rifle, although these products were no longer sold either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or abroad. But it was impossible to stop this monster, since it accounted for 95% of all Russian industry, its stop would mean that 95% of the country's most qualified workforce, the color of the engineering and technical corps and almost all science would be left without work. This promised a social explosion that could destroy not only what was left of Russia, but also shake the whole world, including the United States.

Our country, as is known, despite all its power and optimism, reacts very painfully to world cataclysms that can undermine the stability of its very vulnerable financial and economic system. There was no way out, and the new Russian government did not find anything better than to enter the market, continuing to support its monstrous military-industrial complex at the expense of the state budget (and there was, of course, no other budget in this country), receiving nothing in return but new rounds of inflation, which, with the rings of a giant boa constrictor, strangled the last sprouts of life in a doomed country, threatening to turn into hyperinflation, which inevitably had to lead to the same social explosion as when the military-industrial complex was stopped.

Such was the vicious circle into which Russia fell due to the indefatigable ambitions of its illiterate leaders, from Lenin to Brezhnev. However, the current President did not differ much from his unlucky predecessors, although, unlike them, he was apparently sincerely full of good intentions, knocked out by jackhammers from the very paved road that leads to hell.

The government headed by him from time to time and not very resolutely tried to throw a bridle on the military-industrial monster, which led to wild tantrums in parliament and at noisy street rallies organized with the money of the same military-industrial complex. The proud barons of the missile, aircraft and tank industries looked with contempt and disgust at the government's conversion plans, suggesting that they switch to the production of refrigerators, pots and irons, the lack of which was acutely felt throughout the former Soviet empire. The barons stubbornly wanted to make tanks and made them. Then a special team cut these tanks and sent them to be melted down. The tanks were turned into metal, which was again sent to the tank factory for the production of new tanks. The same thing happened with airplanes, rockets, all kinds of ammunition, and even warships.

The boa constrictor that was strangling the country bit its own tail. Seeing no way out, the government hinted that the military-industrial complex itself was looking for a market for its products. By this time, the military-industrial complex had formed something like its own political party, placing at the head of it Arkady Volsky, a former KGB general and a major party functionary with great connections both in overt and underground structures of the former empire, inside it and abroad.

Of course, we managed to quickly fasten the crushed Russia to the mainstream of our foreign policy, forcing it to join the sanctions on the supply of weapons to Iraq, Libya, Cuba, North Korea, Serbia and a number of African countries, where Soviet weapons once flowed, providing the USSR if not material benefits, then undoubted political benefits. To the credit of the former USSR, it should be noted that he never traded in the latest models of his weapons, partly out of fear that they would fall into our hands, partly because of an unwillingness to make their clients especially strong. Now the situation has changed radically. Having received a hint from the government, the military factories themselves began to look for buyers who could pay them in dollars. There were plenty of them, from Saddam Hussein and Kim Il Sung to the leaders of numerous terrorist groups, eager to get their hands on weapons of mass destruction to blackmail all of humanity.

Naturally, under such conditions, the barons of the military-industrial complex did not even want to think about any obligations or sanctions of the central government, such as a convention on the non-proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons, not to mention any sanctions there regarding the so-called conventional weapons. And potential customers were taken aback by the opportunities that presented themselves, mainly because of the cheapness of the goods offered. For example, a fighter-bomber, almost as good as ours in terms of combat parameters, could be purchased on the territory of the former USSR for 40 thousand dollars, a modern tank for 5 thousand dollars, a bomb with a volumetric explosion or with a chemical filling for 200 dollars, a grenade launcher for 50 dollars, and machine guns for \$20 in any quantity. What those who had billions of dollars could acquire, I didn't even want to think. The cancer that suffocated communism not only did not die with communism, but began to spread metastases all over the world. The decaying corpse of communism threatened to destroy all of humanity.

Add to this the incredible corruption and irresponsibility that engulfed all of Russia, when even the Chairman of the KGB Bakatin had to admit that any of his people can easily be bought for a hundred dollars, and you can imagine the conditions under which we, a handful of CIA employees, whose main task was to prevent the spread of deadly metastases from the territory of the former USSR. In part, we managed to take control of nuclear weapons located on the territory of Russia and Ukraine, we managed to convince the President to cancel combat patrols of strategic nuclear missile submarines in the world's oceans and to lay up virtually the entire fleet. We managed to ensure that the supply of fuel to aviation and missile units was reduced by more than half. But all this was a drop in the ocean. Of course, we had neither the strength, nor the means, nor the opportunity to keep track of all the chaos that was devouring the remnants of Russian statehood.

Therefore, we focused our main attention on atomic, chemical and bacteriological weapons, taking all possible and impossible measures so that they would not spread all over the world, falling into bloodthirsty and irresponsible hands.

It also took us a lot of time to maintain a precarious political balance in a country where any bullet fired into the President's head could cause a monstrous chain of terrible and irreversible consequences. And any gang of terrorists or professional killers of the highest qualification could enter today's Russia, even without very disguised.

In general, we had enough work. And every day brought new surprises. On Christmas Eve, we received information that thirty ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear charges of any power have disappeared from various military bases in vast Russia. Saddam Hussein and Kim Il Sung were considered potential buyers. There are about two thousand closed cities in Russia, some of which are underground, about which we knew only that

They exist. In one of them, railway trains were formed, which were supposed to deliver disassembled missiles and warheads for them, disguised as various general-purpose cargo, to one of the ports on the territory of Russia or Ukraine. From there, on ships under the most harmless flags, such as Cypriot or Liberian, the cargo was supposed to be delivered to the customer.

Japanese intelligence has said that it has full control of the former Soviet Far East and believes that neither China nor North Korea are the customers. China has its own missiles and is more likely to need specialists to improve them than ready-made foreign samples. As for Kim Il Sung, even now he is not interested in acquiring global weapons systems, since his plans do not at all include a confrontation in his old age with the whole world. Meanwhile, through Israeli intelligence, we knew that the frequent visits to Baghdad by representatives of far-right Russian nationalist groups, such as Sergei Baburin and his friends, are, if we discard emotions and big words about a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, simple mediation missions with the aim of restoring the military the relics of Saddam, almost destroyed during the famous war in the Persian Gulf.

With the ability to blackmail the whole world with a nuclear missile strike, Hussein could easily do so many things that the whole world would have to clean itself from the crap that had stuck to it for another thousand years. Of course, Hussein would never have been able to mount three dozen stationary ballistic missiles imperceptibly, but he would not hesitate to try to do this, which would lead to another military crisis, to our air strikes on Iraqi missile bases, and possibly to the involvement of ground forces, like during Desert Storm.

Not to mention many other things, it would have cost the American taxpayer many times more than to intercept and destroy these very missiles on Russian territory according to a method worked out since the time of the famous story with the ANT cooperative, whose tanks, by the way, were also intended for Saddam Hussain. We worked, and quite fruitfully, with some of the former KGB structures that we managed to recruit both by the methods mentioned by the former KGB chief Bakatin and by some others. And, of course, our recommendations were almost unquestioningly carried out by the Russian government. It was on our recommendation that the strictest customs posts were introduced on almost all the borders of the former Soviet republics. This created a lot of inconvenience for the local population, but gave additional insurance that deadly cargo would not reach any seaport undetected. In this case, a very interesting situation was obtained, when some departments of the former KGB fought with other departments that were developing operations to export weapons abroad. So everyone was in business. Some received their dollars from Hussein or Kim Il Sung, others from us. And we tried to pay more. And ordered music.

As a result, when trains were formed in the bowels of Arzamas-24, we already knew that they would have nowhere to go, except for the port of Leningrad, where we planned to cover them. The port of Novorossiysk, being an oil harbor, was completely unsuitable for such cases, other ports of the eastern part of the Black Sea were in the combat zone of the ongoing Caucasian War for many years, and the main Black Sea port of Odessa was controlled by Ukraine, and the organizers of this entire operation would hardly have agreed to raise the cost of all three times this scam, smearing bribes on Ukrainian customs officers who are already on our payroll.

The ports of the Sea of Azov could not be taken into account because of their shallow water and medieval equipment. The fact that Murmansk and Vladivostok were not suitable for this purpose was clear even to a child. Firstly, there were no "rolling terminals", and secondly, the thin threads of the railways leading there are always packed to capacity and do not give any

room for maneuver. So there was only Leningrad, renamed St. Petersburg by the romantic democrats. This more than suited us, since both the mayor of the city and, more importantly, the new head of the St. Petersburg security department, Colonel Berkesov, were our people, ready to do whatever we ordered them to do. Although, sparing their purely Slavic insecurities, we never ordered, but clothed all our demands in the form of recommendations stuffed with dollars.

Colonel Berkesov has been working with us since the Andropov times. Then the guys from Langley, considering the most optimal ways to undermine the communist system from the inside, decided that there was nothing better than to use all the energy of a huge monster called the KGB to fight dissent within the country, in particular, to fight the so-called anti-Soviet literature. With our money, that is, with the money of the CIA, countless books and magazines in Russian were published - from Solzhenitsyn and Avtorkhanov to completely unknown authors without any literary talent at all, but who were in implacable opposition to the communist regime. Cooperating with the KGB officers we recruited, we sent tons of this literature to the USSR, and that's when Berkesov helped us a lot, mercilessly throwing behind bars everyone who dared to keep or read such books. Berkesov's fast career prompted many of his other colleagues to engage in similar activities, as a result of which almost all counterintelligence activities of the KGB were paralyzed. It was a brilliant operation. If we were given orders for such deeds, as they did in the USSR, then we would all be bent under their weight.

After the collapse of the CPSU, Berkesov fell on hard times. Naturally, everyone wanted to eat him: from envious colleagues to readers of forbidden literature released from prisons who dreamed of settling scores with Berkesov. But we managed not only to keep him in the security service, but even to promote him to the post of head of the St. Petersburg Department, although, to be honest, this was not at all easy, since Berkesov was already a household name in the city.

He was a young guy (a little over forty). It seemed to me that he had no principles and convictions, but he suited us in every respect. We didn't go to his heart. It's not in our rules. It is another matter to release the soul from the sinful body, if the need arises, but one should never climb into the soul itself. Moreover, as we were taught, the Russian soul is always a mystery. We have never tried to question this axiom.

So, theoretically, these missiles could not fall into the hands of Saddam or whom they were intended for there.

By this time, my second five-year tour of work in Moscow was coming to an end. I was going on vacation, hoping not to return to Moscow again. Given my work in the Middle East, I was already eligible to get a job in the States or anywhere else of my choice. I even booked myself a Moscow-Paris plane ticket, hoping to spend a couple of weeks in France, where I had some business. However, Fate, which decided everything differently and made me a witness to the most incredible story that almost sent me to the next world, chose our cryptographer Tony Lacino as her messenger, who suddenly appeared in my office with a grin that did not bode well.

"You have a dispatch from Langley," he said, grinning even more vilely and taking a piece of paper out of the folder.

- What does it mean? I asked, running my eyes over the columns of five-digit numbers arranged in an intricate pentagon. My question was directed to Tony because I wanted to know why he was giving me the decrypted dispatch. But he understood my question

otherwise.

"That means," Tony said, still grinning nastily, "that means your vacation is over, Mike." I'm willing to bet ten dollars.

- Why did you cover yourself? I asked stupidly, although I was already beginning to understand something.

"If they," Tony explained kindly, "are sending you a message encrypted with your personal code just before the holidays, then something must have happened here that requires your personal participation.

And, laughing, the cipher clerk left me alone with the dispatch.

I put those damned numbers on a computer display and inserted a magnetic card with my personal code into it. The numbers disappeared, turning into even lines of letters. After reading the message, I realized that someone was crazy: either I or my superiors at Langley. Having made a printout, I lit a cigarette and carefully read the encryption again:

"According to the reliable information we have, a Coyote flew from Paris on a flight to St. Petersburg with a fake passport in the name of the Swedish scientist Gustav Larsson. In connection with the upcoming meeting of the presidents in Moscow, a catastrophe is possible. In contact with the local authorities, take measures to neutralize and destroy. Under your own responsibility. Use the red channel. Confirm the start of the performance. Louise."

I called Louise a slut out loud, even though she was just the code name for my boss, Bill Trockman, who was apparently still recovering from the Christmas break.

Of course, Coyote does not fly anywhere in vain, and even more so to Russia. Of course, his ominous shadow is behind almost all assassination attempts on prominent political figures from various countries. Daring, cunning and the most dangerous terrorist of the 20th century. If he flew somewhere, then there you need to put on the ears the entire police and security service, and even the army. It was me. It's clear.

There was only one thing I didn't understand.

Coyote, alias Giuseppe Toldini, alias Baron Siegfried von Heistendorf, alias Stefan of Sulsky and, damned if I remembered all the names under which he acted, had been dead for at least ten years. He died in December 1981 in Nice. Hiding practically in front of my eyes. The Israeli "Mossad" staged a real raid on Coyote, although he did not work in cooperation with Arab terrorists, but, perhaps, exchanged information and consulted with them. In any case, in the summer of 1979 he arrived in Beirut, where he tried to establish contact with one from pro-Iranian groups.

The meeting was to take place in a suburban hotel in the Lebanese capital, but on the way there, Coyote ran into an Israeli ambush. Two of his men were killed, but Coyote escaped with only a minor head wound. The wound was minor, but left a scar over his temple, which Coyote did not quite like. What happened next is not well known, but in December 1981, as I mentioned, Coyote was found dead in a hotel room in Nice. Someone fired three bullets at him point-blank from a .45 American Army Colt. Coyote's funeral was attended by detectives from almost all over the world, even from the Vatican, as if he were a crowned lady. Everyone brought his dossier with them. The deceased was photographed, measured, compared fingerprints, birthmark schemes and something else that is part of the modern and very complex procedure for identifying a person. Nobody had any doubts. It was Coyote. I myself saw his corpse in the anatomical theater, not to mention the fact that I studied all the materials and looked through all the photographs and videotapes related to this story.

Maybe some new Coyote has appeared? But it was absolutely incredible that I

did not know this.

While I was racking my brains about what all this could mean, my red cipher telephone, which works via a satellite connection directly with Washington, beeped plaintively. I picked up the phone and heard the hoarse voice of Bill Trokman:

— Mike! Can you hear me well? Fly urgently to St. Petersburg.

Are you all crazy there? I yelled. "What nonsense did you send me in cipher?" I still didn't have enough to chase the revived dead here! Where did this Coyote come from?

— Don't boil it, Mike! Trokman interrupted my monologue. "I know as well as you that Coyote is dead. But he was seen in Paris, where every Azhan knows him. Do you remember how he got there? And you, apparently, know how cleverly these guys know how to pretend to be dead. In any case, we have no right to take risks. Now one good shot in the empty head of the President can lead to such consequences that the world will shatter into smithereens. Do you understand me?"

"Damn me," I growled, "if I understand anything at all!" If he was identified in Paris, why wasn't he arrested on the spot?

— Well, you know those Frenchmen, Mike! Bill replied. "They always think that they are smarter and more cunning than everyone in the world. They decided, apparently, not to get involved, so as not to create reasons for all sorts of scandals. They have done this many times already. Remember the cases with Abu-Hasan, Abu-Nadil, with the Jackal, with Khabbash. All in the same scenario. They are allowed to leave France, and then they begin to squeal to the whole world. So I ask you to urgently fly to Petersburg and keep an eye on this guy, whoever he is - dead or alive, coyote or skunk. And then you can go on vacation or wherever you want. I spoke to the boss. He wants to see you in Washington for the next two hundred years.

I was silent.

"Keep me constantly informed," Trokman continued, "use all channels of the red spectrum. OK? Have a good hunting!"

"Okay," I sighed and hung up the phone.

After smoking a cigarette and admiring Coyote's face on the display, I called our Consulate General in St. Petersburg to Frank Crump, vice-consul for culture, who was also the CIA resident in the city and reported directly to me.

"Frank," I said, "meet me tonight at Pulkovo. I'm leaving on the next flight.

- Something happened? Kramp asked.

- Yes. A certain Swede flew to your city. His name is Gustav Larsson. Contact Berkesov and ask them to keep an eye on him. The matter is very important.

Then I called General Klimov in Lubyanka, who was a kind of liaison officer between us and the former KGB.

"Mike," he rejoiced, "will you be at Nathan's tonight?"

"Probably not," I replied, "urgent work."

"Would you like to hire my operatives?" Klimov suggested. - For a hundred or two

dollars, they will do any work for you, even the most menial.

He chuckled into the phone, apparently in a good mood.

"I would be glad," I answered him in a tone, "but the work is very delicate and I will have to do it myself, although, to be honest, I don't feel like it at all.

I briefed him briefly.

— Coyote? he asked, pretending to remember something. "But it seems to have been eliminated a long time ago. It seems in France, if my memory serves me right?

One of the versions of Coyote's death in Nice, and the most plausible one, was the version that he was removed by the KGB, fearing exposure after the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II. Coyote met in Adjoy and lived in Sofia for a long time, where he even had a cooperative apartment paid for by the security service.

General Klimov recalled Coyote so painfully that one might think that the KGB (or whatever it is now called) had not received through its channels the message that Coyote had flown to Petersburg. On the one hand, this amused me, but on the other hand, it alarmed me. Isn't this whole story with Coyote invented by someone in order to pull the missiles out of the country under its guise? But why Coyote? You never know living terrorists with no less big names! Or is there a double psychological trap here, consisting precisely in the fact that Coyote is considered dead? The method is also not very new. In his time, Christ used it very effectively.

The analogy with Christ that came to my mind made me remember that the Second Coming always set the salvation of the human race as its main goal. This means that the second coming of the Antichrist must set itself a diametrically opposite task. Because the resurrection of Coyote could not be attributed to the forces of Good. I did not have time to properly think out my idea about the second coming, because General Klimov stopped playing the fool and asked:

- So you're flying to St. Petersburg? We have already directed Berkesov to keep an eye on this Lapson. I don't think it's necessary to take it right away. Maybe he will lead to some of his connections.

"Thank you," I thanked Klimov and began to get ready for the airport.

Even the waiting room for diplomats at Sheremetyevo was reminiscent of the Saigon airport during the days of our evacuation from Vietnam. It was very difficult to imagine that all this motley and excited crowd was part of the diplomatic corps accredited in Moscow. A fragile young man with a shy face in rimless glasses approached me and said in fairly tolerable English:

"Mister, for just five dollars I'll show you a dick you've never seen before."

"Do you have it with you or will you have to go to town to get it?" I asked.

The young man nodded timidly and said:

"He is here with me.

"Boy," I told him in Russian, "once in Haiti I saw a cock of the famous Jumbo Naga. Exactly thirteen and a half inches. If you offer me something more monumental, I will pay fifty dollars. If not, then the money is on you.

Agreed?

So you're not an American? the young man whispered in horror and disappeared.

A few seconds later, a policeman approached me, under whose sergeant's epaulettes I guessed at least a KGB captain, and politely asked in Russian:

May I have a look at your papers?

- Something happened? I was surprised.

"Just so that nothing happens," he answered, "the hall is intended for diplomats, and everyone who is not lazy is trying to get in here ...

I gave him my passport.

"Gerald Michael McIntyre," the sergeant read aloud for some reason, apparently to demonstrate to me his ability to read English. — Assistant Cultural Attache, Embassy of the United States of America. It's all right," he saluted, "sorry.

Apparently, I was the first American who was not interested in the unique member of a shy young man who most likely worked with a sergeant on shares.

Arriving in St. Petersburg and having dinner at the consulate in the company of Frank Crump, I listened to the latest news. Gustav Larsson, a physicist from Sweden, came to St. Petersburg for a symposium on the preservation of the ozone layer of the atmosphere, where he will make a report tomorrow. Stay in the city for a week. He's booked a return ticket to Stockholm. I stayed at the Angleterre Hotel, where I booked a room through the Aeroflot agency in Paris. Berkesov's people had already photographed him ten times and promised to send the photographs to the consulate soon. A small hitch came out with fingerprints, but no later than tomorrow they will also be taken.

"The technique of fingerprinting," Crump grimaced, "they haven't changed since the days of Sherlock Holmes.

We had already finished dinner and were sitting sipping Crump's cocktails when Chris, Crump's wife and chief cultural adviser, walked in, in which Crump himself, who had once graduated from West Point and joined the CIA from military intelligence, understood, to put it mildly, superficially.

Chris brought a large blue envelope with photographs of Larsson, which Berkesov's subordinates handed over to the policeman who was on duty at the entrance to the consulate, who handed it over to the guard marines stationed in the lobby. The famous slogan of Reagan and Gorbachev "From confrontation to cooperation" has already been implemented, at least in the work of the secret services.

If the technique of fingerprinting, according to Crump, was reminiscent of the times of Sherlock Holmes, then the technique of photography, judging by the photographs brought, was even worse. The pictures are black and white and not very sharp. But there were about a dozen of them. Larsson at the customs control turnstile, Larsson at the airport exit, Larsson at the car, Larsson in the hotel lobby, Larsson at the entrance to his room, Larsson at the bar, etc.

I laid out pictures of Coyote on the table. Indeed, the resemblance is striking. But the most interesting thing was that in my photographs of Coyote, he did not yet have a scar on his forehead from an Israeli bullet, while Larsson did.

"You know, guys," Chris said unexpectedly, "I saw this guy somewhere.

"I doubt it," Frank chuckled. - When you graduated from university, you could see his portrait in almost all the newspapers.

"And on TV too," I added.

- Not at all, - Chris flashed, - I saw him here, in St. Petersburg, and quite recently. I just can't remember where. And this scar...

- How recently? Yesterday? Day before yesterday? A week ago?

- No no. Seems like two or three weeks ago. Only where? I do not remember.

Remember Chris!

- No I can not. Remember, I'll tell you.

- Maybe one of the artists?

"Maybe... No, not there. Stop it, Mike, don't push me. I will remember.

II

The hall in which the ecological symposium was held was filled almost to capacity, but I was ready to swear that Berkesov's people made up the majority of the audience. They are easily recognized by radiant smiles with empty or preoccupied looks. Their eyes never smile. Either this is intended, or this is a serious puncture in preparation.

The manner of wearing ties also betrays them. It is immediately clear that the tie is worn by order. They are always turning their heads around, like cavalry horses on which they have put on a yoke, now tightening the knots of their ties, then loosening them. Berkesov himself sat, as usual, on the podium with a worried face, but in a chic bright tie of the French company Gauthier, bought in a special distributor at the former regional committee of the CPSU, which, despite all the assurances of the current authorities, continued to work as if nothing had happened.

He sat in the presidium and, apparently, using methods known only to him, conducted his people in the hall. So many uniformed policemen were overtaken in the foyer that it seemed that this was not a scientific symposium, but at least a rally of some extremist group that could turn into street riots or a Jewish pogrom.

The symposium was opened by the mayor of the city with a long welcoming speech, which spoke a lot about the new free Russia and the global environmental challenges already partially solved thanks to the collapse of communism and the introduction of a multi-party democratic system.

Colonel Berkesov listened to the mayor with an expression of boredom on his face, giving commands to the hall with his eyes, like a flagship battleship with a searchlight. In obedience to these commands, his people either jumped up from their seats and ran out of the hall, then stood at the door, then simply got up, waiting for the command to sit down.

When one of them made his way between the rows, almost stepping on my foot, I heard from under the skirt of his jacket the crackle of a portable radio station and a distinct voice with commanding intonations: "17-25! Block traffic to the square from Nevsky!" - "Understood!" answered another voice.

Apparently, at least three rows, where Kramp and I sat, were packed with Chekists and there was no one to be ashamed of. Professor Larsson was sitting on the presidium two people from Berkesov, and the colonel was probably sincerely afraid that Coyote might come up with the idea of destroying the hall with a machine gun or something like that right from the presidium, because to the right and left of the Swedish scientist were sitting two completely gorilla-like creatures, shaking their heads in martyrdom because of the ties that choked them. The third stood behind Larsson and played the role of an interpreter.

Leaning towards the Swede's ear, he translated the speakers' speeches to him. Larsson, smiling, nodded his head and made some notes in a notebook. No one else was given such an honor, of course, there was no simultaneous translation, so if Larsson really was a Coyote, he already had every reason to jump out the window.

To be honest, this bothered me a little. Berkesov brought a whole team of photographers into the hall, and two of his people worked with a video camera. The Berkesovs were not allowed into the hall on official television, and they quarreled with policemen in the foyer, from where they heard loud references to the law on the press and mass media. A resonant female voice exhorted: "Comrades! Let's calm down. This is a working symposium, and at the request of our foreign guests, it was decided not to film, so as not to interfere with the fruitful process ..."

Larsson spoke in Swedish. The translator, who looked like an army bulldozer, did his best to translate. As soon as the Swede appeared on the podium, a young man in an impeccable trio emerged from somewhere behind the scenes and placed a glass of water on a saucer in front of Larsson. All speakers before that did without such a service. Larsson immediately grabbed a glass and took a valiant sip. The young man, having covered the glass with a napkin, immediately took it away.

I sighed and tried to focus on what Coyote was saying from the podium. Professor Larsson's theory was interesting. Hordes of viruses, grouped in huge hordes in space, are constantly trying to break through to the ground. Viruses are the most destructive forces in the universe. They cannot be denied intelligence, collectivism and courage. And their perseverance in achieving the goal is unparalleled. Thrown away by the protective layers of our atmosphere, despite monstrous losses, they regroup, replenishing their ranks through a well-thought-out breeding system, and again rush to the attack. It is possible that there are forces on Earth that are sympathetic to viruses or even allied with them.

It was these forces that cut holes in the ozone layer for them, through which AIDS had already broken through to the earth. But AIDS is still flowers, so to speak, the vanguard of the advancing army, and the fate of mankind will be terrible, because viruses not only kill, but also mutate.

"You will fall asleep as people," Larsson frightened, "and wake up as fat and vile worms swimming in excrement.

Then I realized with surprise that Larsson speaks Russian without any accent. I glanced at Berkesov, trying to understand whether he had noticed this or not. But the colonel was obviously not up to me. The break was approaching, and with a movement of his eyes and eyebrows he sent his youngsters into the foyer by the dozen.

"I came to this symposium," Larsson continued in Russian, "to state directly and frankly that if viruses have allies on our planet, then they are in this country. For almost a century now, your country has been trying to destroy all of humanity, resorting to the most sophisticated and diverse methods for this, with a persistence reminiscent of the purposefulness of the most dangerous viruses. Lack of control over military production, attempts to reach the level of high technologies in

chemistry, bionics and electronics with the help of antediluvian, medieval equipment and slave labor has already led to irreversible consequences in your country and threatens to destroy the entire human civilization. It is necessary to cure the earth, starting with your country, and, Since no medicine can do this, there remains the surgeon's knife, which has already divided your country into fifteen parts and intends to shred it further until it destroys all the cells of your body that are struck by madness!

As they say in the novels, there was a painful silence. Berkesov's people looked at their boss, not knowing how to react: to applaud or not? The colonel sat purple with indignation at Larsson's hooligan speech. The few scientists who were in the hall, mostly in the front rows (if Coyote opens fire, then let them get it first), were also stunned by such a sharp and tactless speech of their Swedish colleague and did not know how to react to all this, and even in the presence Berkesov himself, whom every schoolchild in the city knew.

I cheered up, because this trick was exactly in the spirit of the Coyote. He nevertheless threw a bomb into the hall, and Berkesov's militants failed to stop him. In the deathly silence of the hall, Larsson left the podium and went to the exit, dragging the entire Berkes army with him.

I was smoking in the foyer when Berkesov, passing by, with a glance suggested that I follow him. We approached the door with a traditional Russian sign "Entrance is forbidden to strangers." There was a bell on the door, but Berkesov opened it with his key.

"About two years ago," he admitted to me, "I would have arrested this Swede right in the hall for such a provocation, I would have found out who paid him for it, and then I would have sent him out of the country,

"But you, as far as I know, like democracy?" I asked.

"Within the limits of tact and legality," replied Bernesov.

"Don't get angry, Colonel," I consoled him, "perhaps you will have the opportunity to arrest Larsson in a few hours.

I took out a photocopy of Coyote's fingerprint card from the case and asked Berkesov:

What's with the prints? They are ready?

"We sent the glass to the administration," Berkesov said. - They will do it and let you know.

- And what, on the spot it was impossible to remove them? I didn't understand, forgetting about Crump's warning.

"We have our own methods," Berkesov blushed,

From somewhere behind the cupboard, the same young man who brought the glass to Larsson suddenly appeared. This time he brought us coffee.

- Well, what is there? Berkesov asked impatiently.

"Sent to the Directorate, Comrade Colonel," the young man reported, placing cups of coffee in front of us with the dexterity of a professional waiter. - They will report to you personally by the selector.

And he disappeared behind the closet.

We silently drank coffee when the selector on the table came to life and a woman's voice sounded in it: "Comrade Colonel!"

"Yes, yes," Berkesov perked up, "report!"

— Comrade Colonel, there are no prints on the glass. Only an employee.

"Why not," Berkesov said, restraining himself and blushing, "when I myself saw how he grabbed a glass with all five of his fingers. What are you doing there, you can't do the simplest things!"

The excited voice of the woman began to sound dry:

"Comrade Colonel, you can come and see for yourself. There are no prints on the glass that Major Shepelev delivered to us.

- Shepelev! called Berkesov. The young man appeared from behind the closet. — Did you take the glass to the Office? Didn't crash along the way?

- That's right, Comrade Colonel, I drove! passed; as expected in the laboratory.

Berkesov blushed.

- Kind of idiotic.

I was silent, because I was not sure that the Berkesov troupe, playing a play according to their script, was not fooling me, a lonely spectator.

The selector came to life again and reported: "In his room. Taking a shower."

Berkesov looked at his watch.

Let's go to the Office. Let's figure it out.

We drove from the House of Scientists on Palace Embankment to the famous Big House on Liteiny in less than five minutes, ignoring all traffic rules. Berkesov's black "Volga" rolled up to the 2nd entrance. Major Shepelev, deftly jumping out almost on the move, opened the doors for us.

"Don't let the car go," Berkesov ordered, going into the entrance.

The two ensigns standing there famously stretched out and saluted him, as if at a parade. The Colonel, nodding coldly to them, went to the door with a dial lock.

— And comrade? one of the ensigns dared to ask.

- Comrade with me. According to my ID," Berkesov said without turning around, pressing the dial buttons so that, God forbid, I would not see the cherished numbers.

The opened door led us to a small vestibule with three elevators, near which another ensign was sitting on a stool. At the sight of Berkesov he jumped up.

"I wish you good health, Comrade Colonel!"

Berkesov muttered something in response. The elevator doors parted and we entered a dimly lit cabin with traces of a mirror that once hung there. There were no buttons in the cockpit, but there were slots trimmed with copper inserts, arranged in a chaotic disorder so that no one knew which floor he was going to. Such elevators were invented by the French, I think, in 1948. They were commissioned by several European banks out of fear of raiders. In the same years, the Russians either bought them or stole them and used them mainly for equipping state security buildings and various party offices.

Pushing me back to the corner of the cab and once again hiding an important state secret with his body, Berkesov stuck a copper plate (or maybe a comb) into one of the slots. The elevator rumbled like a heavy tank and went somewhere.

At the exit we were met by another ensign with a stone face. We went into a small room, where an officer in full uniform was sitting at a table lined with telephones with a cap, sword belt and pistol. At the sight of Berkesov he jumped up, putting his hand to his visor.

- Comrade Colonel, during my duty...

The colonel waved his hand, interrupting the report, and with the words: "It happened, a lot of things happened," he went through the oak-trimmed door with the "Reception" sign.

In a large reception room, some fine fellows in civilian clothes and girls in the uniform of ensigns were sitting at tables. Out of habit, I expected that they would all jump to their feet and shout in unison: "We wish you good health, Comrade Colonel!", and Berkesov would command them: "At ease!". But none of them even moved at the sight of their boss, only one of the girls in uniform approached him and handed over a folder with some documents, while saying something.

"Good," Berkesov nodded his head and went to the massive door with a brand new sign "Head of the Department, Colonel Berkesov Vasily Viktorovich."

I bet myself five dollars that an ensign would be outside the door, and I lost. There was no one. There were at least three more ways to get into the office of the head of the department, so much so that no one even knew about the atom. In addition, Berkesov had at least three more command posts at "points" in different parts of the city, not to mention the region.

The fact that he dragged me here, and even through the reception, was also not accidental. Apparently, he wanted to demonstrate to everyone that the confrontation was over and cooperation had begun, and he was acting completely officially, obeying Klimov's directive.

During my work in the former USSR and in Russia, I had to deal with many Chekists, and Berkesov differed little from his colleagues. He constantly lived in some kind of cocktail out of fear and hope that one fine morning he would wake up under the new Joseph Stalin. On the one hand, he really wanted this, but, on the other hand, remembering the glorious history of his own institution, he could not help but fear that he would be the first to be shot. For what - find.

At least for the fact that I saw exactly which slot in the wall of the elevator he put his record, although for twenty years we have had the most detailed plans of all their large Directorates, primitive as the palaces of the pharaohs ...

The first thing that caught your eye upon entering Berkesov's office was a huge oil-painted portrait of Dzerzhinsky. The fact that the monument to the sinister founder of the bloodiest secret police in history was thrown off the pedestal on Lubyanka Square, and he himself was openly branded with a seal as a vile sadist and murderer, did not make any impression on the glorious successors of his cause.

Portraits of Dzerzhinsky continued to adorn almost all offices both in Lubyanka and here (not to mention the provinces), increasing in size according to the rank of the owner of the office. By rank, Colonel Berkesov probably had the largest portrait in the Directorate. Larger portraits were already supposed to be hung on the facades of six-story buildings. A strange form of paganism.

On the colonel's desk, like a herd of elephants, multicolored telephones were piled up.

selector (exactly the same as in the House of Scientists) and a computer, however, turned off. Berkesov opened an almost imperceptible door to the left of the table and we went into the rest room, furnished with pretense of comfort.

The glazed walls were filled with labels of cheap European drinks (probably confiscated or taken as tribute from street stalls, since, among other things, Berkesov's service controlled virtually the entire city racket) and packs of overseas cigarettes.

Bernesov himself did not smoke, but drank, unlike his predecessors, very moderately. He sincerely loved his wife and two daughters and even, according to unverified information, dabbled in poetry. He came to our attention a very long time ago, when he was still an ordinary investigator with the rank of lieutenant, taken to the KGB after graduating from the University. Berkesov worked with inspiration, like a poet, without getting out of his office for sixteen hours. No one better than him could force a wife to testify against her husband, a husband against his wife, parents against their children, and vice versa. You can argue with me as much as you like, but only a person with genuine poetic inspiration can do such a thing.

"A hundred Berkesovs," the director of the CIA once blabbed, "did more to bring down communism and the Soviet Union than our billions of dollars and all sixteen aircraft carriers." The director was from former admirals. So I only dared to say, "Yes, sir."

- Would you like something to drink? Berkesov suggested wearily.

- I'd rather smoke.

Berkesov winced. He could not stand tobacco smoke, but he allowed it, remarking:

"Just don't pitch one after the other as you're used to. Then the year will need to be aired

After you...

"Don't worry, Colonel," I assured him, "at the current price of cigarettes, I've given up my bad habits a long time ago." You get everything for free, and I have to for everything to pay.

Berkesov blushed. He has a very sweet habit of blushing and looking offended.

"You might think," he said, "that you made little money on scams with our oil and non-ferrous metals. Do you think that if you stuffed the throats of Kryuchkov, Ryzhkov and Pavlov with dollars in your time, then nothing is known about this. You are here in a semi-legal position, and you are doing business, as in your own colony. And I live on a salary.

- Yes, - I agreed, - but you get it in three different places as a consultant venereologist. But do not worry, Colonel, soon you will have nowhere to put your money.

- Why so?

- We have information that Coyote came to Petersburg to kill you. The dead don't need money.

He laughed.

"I'm too small a fry to be handled by Coyote. If he drops to colonels, he will quickly lose his qualifications.

"I heard at Lubyanka that you will soon be promoted to general," I cooed, lighting a cigarette.

Berkesov blushed with pleasure and, to hide his embarrassment, suddenly translated

talking to me, apparently wanting to do something nice for me for the good news.

"You keep calling me Colonel, MacIntyre. What rank are you yourself?

I laughed. Even if they have a prick on their head that there are no military ranks in the CIA, they don't believe it, and that's it! Even in their official papers, some mythical CIA colonels and majors flash all the time. And our structure is such that even if you want to, it is impossible to draw any army analogies. As for the KGB and the Gestapo, which were created and grew by imitating each other, their main drawback was excessive militarization, which made these services very effective as an instrument of terror directed against their own people, but completely helpless in ordinary intelligence and counterintelligence activities.

Berkesov was a colonel, but his recent predecessor Nosyrev was a colonel general, which corresponded to our four-star general or full admiral! With such forces the communists fought against their own people and now they wonder why their state collapsed. If they had planted marshals in city governments, it would have collapsed even faster. They did not understand this and will not understand soon. And thank God, it is easier for us to work. I remember that about seven or eight years ago they were seriously trying to find out my rank in the CIA and they almost killed their very well-hidden network in the New England states, which was very unfortunate for us, since we used this network in the dark as one of our channels. That's it. Berkesov looked at me with a sly squint, and in order not to offend him, I said:

- I'm a sergeant by rank.

Berkesov believed this, just as he believed that Coyote had come to Petersburg to kill him. And he did the right thing. I really lied. In my youth, when we still had military service, I was drafted into the Navy, where I served as a radar operator and rose to the rank of senior sailor. In this rank, which corresponded to an army corporal, I was demobilized. So, calling myself a sergeant, I illegally added at least two ranks to myself. And he mentally called himself a "false sergeant."

"You're kidding me," Berkesov hissed, "come on, come on ... Judging by the deeds that you are doing here, you must be ... Was your father a major or not too?"

"A lieutenant colonel," I corrected, "but he served in military intelligence.

My dad really was a lieutenant colonel and a veteran of the Second World War. But this rank was temporary, and when old MacIntyre was thrown out of the army after the end of the war, he was returned to his permanent rank - junior lieutenant. So the old man did not jump me so much, although he once stole the famous nuclear scientist Professor Guttenberg from under the noses of the Germans. He often told me how at the same time they famously, like in a Western, exchanged fire with some SS men who did not want to give this professor away.

While working in Russia, without firing a single shot and not even having a lousy pistol (I turned in my weapons at Langley on my way to Moscow), I sent about two dozen Russian nuclear scientists to the States. Yes, and someone worse, which Colonel Berkesov did not know about supposed to.

"Hereditary scout," Berkesov said ominously.

I laughed again.

— I'm a clerk. Assistant Cultural Attaché, Colonel. I'm going to retire to go into the oil business.

Berkesov glanced nervously at his watch. It turns out that while he entertained me with a conversation, Larsson's glass examined a whole council of forensic experts called by Berkesov from some closed research institutes that belonged to his department. The experts confirmed that there were no prints on the glass.

The glass was solemnly, like holy gifts, delivered to Berkesov's office.

Maybe he was wearing gloves? - Berkesov looked at me, as if asking if we in the West had come up with some kind of cunning gloves that could be noticed

impossible.

"There are such gloves," I sighed, "but they leave traces.

Berkesov thought, apparently wondering if he had the right to entrust me with such an important "material evidence".

"All right," he said at last, "take it. Just don't forget to give. He is behind us listed.

I began to put the glass in a plastic bag, when the selector on Berkesov's desk came to life again and a woman's voice said: "The object is talking on the phone. The subscriber's number is 277-76-33."

"Switch the conversation to me," Berkesov ordered.

"So in French, Comrade Colonel," the selector said guiltily.

Berkesov blushed. He did not know languages, like the vast majority of his colleagues, even those working in foreign intelligence. In general, he was completely unprepared professionally. Throughout his service as an investigator, he only filed cases in court under Articles 70 and 88 of the then Criminal Code, rarely under Article 64, which deals with treason. In other words, he dealt with dissidents, petty smugglers and "spies" who were trying to turn naive first-year soldiers or excessively talkative (mainly due to drunkenness) officers.

Precisely because Berkesov actually knew nothing, except how to fabricate cases, the verdict on which was a foregone conclusion, we dragged him to the head of the department. And they did the same in many other regions. Naturally, our plans did not include the resurrection of Russian counterintelligence on a modern basis and on a true understanding of matters of national security.

"Switch, Colonel," I suggested, "I'll translate."

He looked at me angrily.

- Now they will bring the cassette and the translation.

"It's hard for you to work," I sympathized, "if they would give an application, we would deliver you the necessary equipment.

"Perhaps you could have delivered," he said, looking somewhere at the ceiling, "but in Moscow they will plunder everything anyway. Nothing will reach us.

He sighed. The selector came to life again, this time in a male voice: "Comrade Colonel, the translator from French is not in place today."

- How is it not? Berkesov asked sharply. - Where is she?

"On sick leave," the voice reported, "according to the certificate, he is sitting with a child.

- Here's what, - Berkesov turned purple, - so that in two minutes the translation will be on my table. Call Belyaev!

Berkesov pressed the call button. From the side of the reception, one of the local fellows in civilian clothes appeared. Berkesov handed him a piece of paper:

- Here's the phone. Set the address and keep an eye out. Record everyone who enters and exits. The phone is for listening. Report to me personally.

- Eat! - answered the newcomer and disappeared behind the door.

One of the phones rang. The Colonel picked up the phone.

- Delivered? Quickly her to me. What do you mean we'll translate tomorrow? Tomorrow, dear comrade, we will all be gone in the world if you work like this! Bring her to me.

He looked at me and added:

- We'll handle it ourselves. Workers!

Major Shepelev appeared from the rest room and placed a voice recorder with headphones on Berkesov's table.

- Did you have lunch? the Colonel asked him, and without waiting for an answer he said: "Go and have lunch."

Shepelev darted somewhere towards the wall and disappeared like a mouse.

"Listen," the colonel handed me the headphones, "then you will translate for me."

I put on my headphones and started the tape. "Oh my God!" an agitated female voice said in French, choking, "My God! Are you in Petersburg? I knew... I was waiting. , my love. I want to see you. I'll come to you. May I?" — "Lord! Of course. I'm waiting for you, dear Amair!" Then came short beeps.

I translated the contents of the tape to Berkesov and, at his request, recorded the conversation in Russian on paper.

What is Amair? the colonel asked.

"Probably a proper name," I shrugged.

- Among the nicknames of the Coyote is it listed?

At least I don't know about it.

"The object left the room dressed," the selector said, "going down the hall. He went to the reception desk. He stopped at the souvenir kiosk. He looks through postcards with views of the city. He goes out into the street. He takes a taxi. Captain Belov is driving. I switch to the escort car" .

There was a crack in the selector, then another voice reported: "I am the Fourth. We are following the object along Gogol Street towards Nevsky."

- Keep watching! Berkesov ordered.

At that moment, two telephones rang piercingly at once. Berkesov grabbed both pipes. The computer, which was on his desk, he did not turn on. Either he did not work, or (most likely) Berkesov did not know how to use it, or he did not have the right to turn it on in my presence.

- Shop? the Colonel asked into the phone. - Which store? Vegetable, corner of Nevsky and Marat? That's how! Find out if there is a worker there named Jeanne or Jeannette. What? Closed for lunch? Listen, don't fool me! Do what you are ordered!

Berkesov dropped the receiver of one telephone and grabbed another. At this time, the third phone rang, and the selector reported: "I'm following the object along the Nevsky towards Gostiny. I'm the Fourth, over!"

At this point, Berkesov was like a New York stockbroker in the 1930s during another stock market boom. If you believe the movies, they were just as frantically grabbing their phones and giving orders over the intercom. They didn't even have computers.

As it turned out, Larsson spoke from the hotel on the phone with a vegetable store on Nevsky. Berkesov's people called from the director's office and are now checking all the store's employees. All entrances and exits of the store are monitored. True, there are huge cellars under the store and what other secret exits there are is unknown.

The selector suddenly spoke in an authoritative bass:

- Vasily Viktorovich! General Pramorenko. Why did your people break into the shop? You're ruining my operation. Was it impossible to agree? After all, there was an agreement that we deal with these issues.

"Alexander Ivanovich," answered Berkesov, "this is a very important matter. Controlled by Moscow. This relationship is not with your Azerbaijanis..."

Again there was a crash, drowning out the general's bass by the signal of the priority channel: "I'm Fourth. The object got out of the taxi at Gostiny Dvor, is heading to the underground passage of the Nevsky Prospekt metro station. I am transmitting the connection to external surveillance."

Click and new voice:

"I'm the Seventh. We follow the object along the underground passage. The object goes through the transition to the other side of Nevsky ..."

There was silence. The phone rang again. The Colonel picked up the phone.

- There is no Jeanne? Check carefully. Be alert. A foreigner may come to the store. A Swede named Larsson. They lead him. Watch carefully what he does.

From the selector came a voice: "I am the seventh! The object has disappeared!"

- How did he disappear? Berkesov did not understand.

"Disappeared in the passage. There is no light at all in one half. They were waiting for him at the exit, but he did not appear. We stood in the illuminated part if he decided to turn back. Disappeared. As it was not."

- I'll give you, "as it was not," Berkesov raised his voice. - I'll turn everyone's heads. Find him immediately. Everyone circle around! Don't show your face to me if...

Here the selector suddenly turned off. The coyote is gone!!

"Congratulations, Colonel," I said, although I was in no mood for jokes. Brilliant operation!

The selector suddenly came to life again and announced: "There is no Jeanne in the store. And there was not."

It would all be damn funny if I wasn't responsible for the entire outcome of the operation.

- All right, - said Berkesov, - he's not going anywhere. Will return to the hotel anyway.

Struck by the iron logic of Berkesov, I was silent. For such a professional as Coyote, neither Berkesov himself nor his people had sufficient training. The case in the underpass, in principle, is elementary. There are about thirty ways of avoiding surveillance in the underground passages, which are visibly divorced in large cities. I'm not sure that Berkesov's people knew at least half of them, and Coyote knew them all, and even had, probably, a couple of his own methods in reserve.

- Connect me to the Lubyanka, Colonel, - I asked,

"Maybe we should wait a bit?" Suddenly he will be, - suggested Berkesov, - however, call. Here's that red phone.

The voice of General Klimov was heard in the receiver. When he found out what was the matter, he exploded:

- What?! Missed? I'll tear Berkesov's eggs off! They put this smart guy on our heads!

- Stop whining! I got angry. - He may appear in Moscow. You understand? Summit and all that.

General Klimov was in a good mood again.

- All right, Mike! Don't teach me how to live. This is where we got it all. But I don't think he will go to Moscow. To go in his position to Moscow through St. Petersburg is generally stupid. There are a lot of safer ways. By the way, we checked with the Swedes: they don't know any Gustav Larsson. Have you checked your channels?

"We'll check," I said, "but it doesn't look like Larsson is even around. He either is or was. Or the Swedes do not want to expose it. This is also not excluded.

- OK. Let's figure it out, - at first Klimov struck me with his hysteria, and now he struck me no less with his equanimity. "By the way, two of your echelons have already arrived at the Moscow freight train and will go to St. Petersburg in a few hours. Is Vasya far from you? Give him the phone.

I handed the phone to Berkesov. It didn't look like he was getting a headwash from Klimov. He listened intently, from time to time saying: "Yes, comrade general. Everything will be done, comrade general. Understood, comrade general." In his heart, he still remained a senior lieutenant. This is the fate of many people with too fast a career.

The selector on Berkesov's desk was silent, the phones too. I glanced at the clock hanging on the wall of the office: it was ten past four in the afternoon. Waiting for the end of the conversation between Berkesov and Klimov, I said:

— I'll go to the consulate. If anything interesting happens, call. If I learn anything new, I will find you. Watch out for exits from the city.

"I know what to do," snapped Berkesov. - Major Shepelev will see you off.

Shepelev saw me off with brilliance. We entered the elevator directly through Berkesov's rest room, walked along some kind of corridor, went up the elevator again and found ourselves in some kind of apartment. Leaving it, we went down the stairs to the courtyard, from which I went out into the street directly opposite our consulate on Furshtatskaya, without meeting a single soul along the way. If Major Shepelev had been kinder, he could probably have escorted me all the way to my office at the consulate. I am sure about that.

III

Anyone who has dealt with the KGB for a long time knows that this organization, no matter how it is renamed, lives and acts according to the laws of the mystical order known only to it. Each individual member of this order can have his own merits and demerits, declare his love or dislike for democracy, expose some cases, both his own and those of his colleagues, pretend that he broke with this organization long ago and plunged headlong into business, but he will always remain a member of his order, which long ago rose above all authorities in Russia and penetrated into all pores of society. It is also impossible to free Russia from this order, like a turtle from a shell. The brothers of the order, tentatively referred to as the KGB, constitute, as it were, the collective mind and strength of the order in that no one outside of it can understand what it wants.

The internal laws of the order are incomprehensible to the outside world, and equally incomprehensible to its individual members. This is a kind of collective instinct for self-preservation as a supranational monster. Therefore, no one ever knows what next step the KGB will come up with. And the KGB does not know. Once it seemed to the monster that he wanted his head to be the head of state. Oceans of blood were shed, but when this was achieved, the monster realized that he did not need it at all and ate his boss himself.

Fortunately for us, the monster was least interested in the security of the state in whose territory he arose and lived. But he had one peculiarity: he fed on human blood, preferring mainly the blood of the population of the country in which he existed. To do this, he constantly exposed his country to sudden attacks from his neighbors, organized famines and epidemics, and when all this was impossible, he devoured the party, whose combat detachment he nominally considered, and even himself. But the state, as such, was of no interest to the monster at all, as if the Leninist idea of the inevitable withering away of the state through its constant strengthening was embedded in its genes.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the monster didn't even flinch. He was hungry, and the Afghan war was clearly not enough for him to feel satisfied. He hoped that the collapse of the empire would give him the opportunity to finally eat to satiety, which, for a number of reasons, the monster could not afford since the mid-fifties.

However, it was not possible to eat properly this time. The blood that was shed in conflicts on the periphery of the former USSR clearly did not suit him. And we had every reason to believe that the monster planned to dismember Russia itself. At the moment it was very easy. It was enough to bring to power one of the nicest people like General Makashov or Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and Russia would split automatically. And both of these figures, as you well knew, existed precisely on the money of the monster. The piquancy of the situation lay precisely in the fact that if I asked, say, Berkesov or Klimov whether they wanted the collapse of Russia, like the USSR, they would firmly and honestly answer me "no." Because they don't know what the monster wants either. If the monster wants it, they'll do whatever

they will be required for the collapse of their own country.

Therefore, it was impossible to trust any of them, even being in full confidence that they were not lying. And such confidence, of course, never existed. The KGB itself could have summoned Coyote, but knowing that this could not be done unnoticed by us, they could play out this entire selector-telephone performance in Berkesov's office in front of my eyes and hide Coyote from us so reliably that no one could have found him until the task was completed. tasks for him.

And the worst thing was that neither Klimov nor Berkesov could know about this. One successful shot by Coyote (and if a monster helps him, then the shot will be successful for sure) will split Russia into at least a dozen states. And this did not suit us Americans at all. Without the Soviet Union, we could still exist, but with the collapse of Russia, that is, with the collapse of the entire system of world balance, we could collapse too.

themselves.

Therefore, Coyote would have to be found, but I did not have the means to find him. All the funds were in the hands of Berkesov, and I got the impression that both he and Klimov somehow calmly reacted to all this. They quarreled for about five minutes for decency and calmed down, as if nothing had happened. True, I knew that both here and in Moscow all airports, railway stations and highways were blocked. But this was of little reassurance if the Coyote was called by a monster. Moreover, when Kramp and I checked the glass from which Larsson drank water while speaking at the House of Scientists, we found that the glass was spun on Rodl's device, which, among other things, can destroy the necessary prints and leave unnecessary ones in such a way that it's not even possible to find fault for what.

So Berkesov complained in vain that no necessary equipment was being sent to him from Moscow. Rodl's device is such a new thing that it was a surprise for us to find it in service with the KGB.

And at the same time, we must not forget that Coyote has been killed for ten years. Go and try to catch a dead man.

Since there was a version that Coyote worked for the KGB in the past and was removed precisely by them in fear of possible revelations, then the thought arose, but was not all this also a staging? Let us assume that the KGB staged the death of Coyote, and, as they say, led him out of the line of fire. Coyote was a world-class professional, and it was very profitable to have such a specialist in stock. Now he was needed and was called to Russia. For what? The child understands that in today's Russia, Coyote can have only one goal - the President. Or two at once - the American and Russian presidents, who are soon to meet in Moscow. After that, Coyote will either be immediately caught or removed, blamed for everything on the CIA, world imperialism, or something like that, and while the United States is recovering from the shock caused by the death of the presidents and the events taking place in Russia, Saddam Hussein will declare that, possessing nuclear weapons and modern means of their delivery, he declares a holy war on the United States. By doing this, he will divert the attention of the United States and the whole world to himself, and, meanwhile, in Russia ... Stop!

But aren't all these mystical stories about Coyote really connected with an attempt to deliver the latest missile systems to Iraq? But why is Coyote here? He's a specialist in political assassinations, not in the secret arms trade. So, these are just different links of one global plan.

While I was thinking about the somber topics of a very likely new world crisis, a photograph of Coyote was shown on local television, accompanied by the following

text: "A foreign citizen left the hotel and went missing. He was last seen in the underground passage of the Nevsky Prospekt metro station. Signs: height 1 meter 82 centimeters, slim, athletic figure, light blond hair, gray eyes. Special signs : a scar from a bullet wound on the left side of the head above the temple ... (I noticed that Coyote has not changed at all in the ten years that I have not seen him.) ... Anyone who can report anything about his whereabouts will be rewarded in currency. Contact by phone..."

Then followed the phones of the Big House, full of sevens and eights. Berkesov treated the currency with complete seriousness. It turned out that Captain Belov, who brought Coyote in a taxi to Gostiny Dvor, received five dollars from his passenger. Berkesov specifically called the accounting department and was interested in whether Belov handed over this money or not. Judging by the length of the conversation, some problems arose there, since Berkesov had to repeat at least twice the phrase "Immediately capitalize. What does a trifle mean? Capitalize immediately!" And here he was going to issue a reward in foreign currency. What a fine fellow!

While I was looking at the TV picture of Coyote, the phone rang. I picked up the receiver and heard the familiar voice of Kostya Orlov:

- Hello, Mike. I accidentally found out that you are in St. Petersburg. There is a business. Can you come to my office for Enlightenment tonight?

Orlov is a former KGB general. A real general, brewed in the belly of a monster since pre-Andropov times. In the middle of the humpback "perestroika", when the CPSU was feverishly spreading the stolen gold around the world, Orlov left the organs, disappeared for some time in obscurity (according to our information in Bonn, Zurich and Tel Aviv), and after the putsch unexpectedly appeared as the general director of the joint-stock closed-type company "Russian Vera" and the owner of a private company "Romashka".

"Russian Vera" was officially considered an insurance company in the entire range of services from an accident to bankruptcy, and "Romashka" traded Western perfumes. In reality, both firms, both joint-stock and private, were intermediary offices, the main task of which was to transfer Russian raw materials to the West at prices much lower than world prices. Through the channels of the company, there was a transfer and laundering of party gold, precious stones, drugs and weapons. Of course, it was one of these channels and, of course, not the most important, but it flourished because of the artificially inflated dollar against the ruble.

The excitement of business in the era of primitive accumulation of capital cannot be compared with anything, and since no other country in the world has entered this stage in such an immoral state of society, one could expect anything from this excitement. Former Chekists and party bosses, dispersed among such fictitious joint-stock companies and fake firms, having huge funds, greedily a flock of piranhas gnawed the remains of the last living tissues on the bones of this unfortunate country, remaining the only real force in it. With the help of dollars, this power was more or less tamed, and we often used it and its channels for our own purposes, sometimes disdaining commissions. For example, we would never have been able to push the same Berkesov to the post of head of the Directorate, if such people as General Orlov had not given their consent to this. They needed Berkesov so that no remnants of old and new state structures would prevent them from doing whatever they please, bypassing any laws, both old and new.

According to the scenario, Saddam's missiles were supposed to slip through General Orlov's "firm" like rats through a sewer pipe. And since my task included this

flood the pipe, Orlov's unexpected call alerted me and I tried to carefully find out what he wants from me. It was not my plan at all to meet him. But "accidentally" he could learn about my arrival only from Berkesov or one of his people. And Berkesov was one of the main characters, whose task was not to launch missiles from the country. This means that even such information is being leaked from Berkesov to Orlov. However, you could guess. Orlov is still a general, and in their system there are not only former generals, but even former sergeants. To the grave, they are listed in the service, and to the grave, the colonel submits to the general. I sensed an interesting plot twist, but said:

"I'm damn tired, Konstantin. Maybe tomorrow? Or explain over the phone what's the matter.

- Wow. By phone! Orlov laughed. - Stop poking around. I'll send a car for you. Painfully important business, and most importantly - money.

In Russia, the fear of phones is in everyone's genes: from a cleaner to a KGB general. Well, it would seem, who can Kostya Orlov be afraid of now? Even if the President himself wanted (and he never wants to) reach out to him, he would not have succeeded. Even if Orlov had been caught riding a Saddam rocket with a suitcase of heroin in his hands, nothing would have happened to him. Today, the only control over him was dollars. Dollars Orlov loved and revered, like some pagan deity like Zeus in the halo of other gods from stamps, pounds and francs. And he was afraid of them, knowing well from experience that the dollar kills when it is angry.

Orlov's office was located in areas of new development - on Prosveshcheniya Prospekt. The huge building, which was once intended for some kind of closed institute, has now been privatized by Orlov and his cronies, or rather, bought at an auction from themselves. He met me in the hall: youthful, fit, slightly drunk, in a well-tailored Finnish suit and a fifty-dollar tie. In the lobby, at all the doors and the elevator, bearish guys in paramilitary uniforms stood silently. Former Afghans and failed world champions in boxing and sambo. In their free time from service, they brought some income to the company with the help of racketeering and various small showdowns with competitors in perfumery. They don't do the real work. There are cooler shots.

"Hello, old man," Orlov smiled broadly, shaking my hand. - Long time no see.

We took the elevator to the third floor. Computer screens sparkled in the spacious room. Several young girls were seated.

"Lena," Orlov said to one of them. - I'm not for anyone.

"All right, Konstantin Pavlovich," the girl answered, "can I make coffee for you?"

Without answering, Orlov opened the door with a massive sign "General Director" and, letting me in first, went into his office decorated in bog oak, furnished somewhat old-fashioned, but with a clear claim to luxury. Massive bronze clock with mermaids. A three-foot statue of Hermes wearing winged sandals. Behind the glass showcase are gilded Easter eggs "a la Faberge". Pictures in heavy frames are probably originals. A multi-channel express telephone, a telecommunications screen, another telephone stylized as the first Edison devices. And, of course, the invariable wall of Western drinks and cigarettes, which speaks more of the owner's financial prosperity than all this old-fashioned antiques.

- Would you like something to drink? Orlov asked.

- Do you have any whiskey?

"Greece has everything," Orlov replied, taking out a bottle of Scotch and crystal glasses.

He poured whiskey into the glasses.

- Let's live! - I drank and smoked.

Russians drink everything in one gulp: both vodka and even collection wines. Even their culture of alcohol consumption is at a very low level. You enjoy whiskey when you drink it.

small sips.

"Well, what's your business?" I asked, sipping my whiskey.

- What are you doing here? Orlov asked. — Because of the missiles or because of Larsson?

"Very interesting," I thought, and, in turn, decided to discard the non-trump jack:

- Do you expect to earn a lot on these rockets?

— Earn? Orlov asked. - If I made money on such cases, then in Iraq there would already be nowhere for a camel to take a shit because of these missiles. Will these faggots let us make money on rockets? Hold your pocket wider! They are all rowing under themselves.

- What kind of faggots? I asked for clarification.

"Faggots," said Orlov with conviction. - We have there (he pointed with his thumb up) there have always been and always will be some faggots! Factories, ministries of defense, Lubyanka - that's who makes money and politics on this. And they use us like a pipe. The pipe earns a lot, that different shit goes through it? So are we. This is like a load for us, so that the service is not forgotten. And no money. Only these leaders want to do everything for free, but they themselves do not know how to work and do not want to. I don't want to work for them either. I answer only when the goods go through the pipe. So I don't give a damn if you intercept those missiles or not. To be honest, I wouldn't send such things to this idiot in Baghdad. He can bring them to us in six seconds. But that's none of my business. But don't touch Larsson. What did you get into it? Do you have little worries?

Did you send him here? I tried to be calm, but I felt that my voice was beginning to ring. And smoked.

Orlov poured more whiskey into the glasses. He was never drunk, but he could drink a canister of alcohol. Although he liked to show off on occasion.

"Mike," he began slowly thinking about the words. We have known each other for ten years, at least. Everything happened, and I did not forget anything. Then in New York, if not for you, I would have fed the fish in the Hudson. And in 1988, if I hadn't intervened, you wouldn't have been found in any morgue. Do you remember? And we have made a lot of grandmas in recent years. So I'll tell you, almost like a friend: I called Larsson here. Z. And I called you to consult me: did Larsson leave much of your legacy in the West? Can you work with him and why are you looking for him?

"I'm not looking for him, but Berkesov," I replied, trying to hide my surprise: could it be that Coyote had been revived in order to burn down a couple of cooperative stalls that prevented Orlov from monopolizing the city's perfume market. - I'm only helping.

Orlov cursed alo:

— What, Berkesov? Berkesov is shit. If necessary, we will shoot him tomorrow as a CIA agent. And he knows it very well. He will not do anything unless he is ordered: either from the Lubyanka, or

We. Yes, and he is not supposed to know much at the present time. I brought Larsson here in such a way that not only Berkesov, but he himself did not know that he had come here. Suddenly, in the newspapers, on TV, everywhere: Professor Gustav Larsson has arrived in your city, he will speak at the symposium and all that and so on. Well, I guess it's business! I quickly sent him, Larsson, back to Sweden out of sin, and then I watched the tape of this symposium, I see: Berkesov is in the presidium, in the hall - half of the Office, and in the middle - you and Kramp. And on behalf of Larsson, some asshole speaks out, looking like a paratrooper in civilian clothes. This is where my roof went completely. I decided not to call Berkesov, but directly to you ...

— And where is this Larsson now? In Sweden?

- Well, yes. I immediately sent him away from sin. Come up with a speech at an environmental symposium! What should he do at an ecological symposium if he is a surgical pathologist!

"Listen, why did you call him? If it's not a secret, I felt that my head was going crazy.

"A secret, of course," Orlov answered, looking at me intently, "but not from you. I've thought of a business and invited you specifically to offer you a share or a good commission, if you help.

— And how much will it be? I asked, still not understanding anything.

"It will," Orlov thought for a moment, "it will be about a million and a half dollars.

- In year?

- Per month.

- Wow! I was surprised. "What kind of business is this, with such huge commissions?

Orlov chuckled.

"Now we have to play big. I'm setting up a factory here for the production of spare parts.

— Spare parts? I asked, frantically thinking about what parts could cost so much. - Parts for what?

He brought his face closer to me and lowered his voice.

— Not to what, but to whom. To a man. Heart, kidneys, etc. In the West, you know how much it all costs. And I will give in bulk, say, three hundred units a month and cheaply. Let's say fifty thousand bucks per unit. Here also consider, what revenue and profit.

I poured myself another whiskey and drank it in one gulp.

— And where will you get so many donors?

The general's eyes became spiky.

- These are my problems. So many unrecorded people have divorced that don't worry, there will be enough for our lifetime. The problem is different. Our medical assholes are all dressed up with laureate medals, but they don't know how to do a damn thing. Stone Age. Especially in everything related to conservation and other things. So I hired Larsson...

- You're completely crazy! I began to lie with inspiration. - Interpol hangs on Larsson. He's full of shit. His file smells like a Chicago dump. You will burn with him on the same day,

How do you start your business...

"My God!" I thought. "What should I do? After all, there is no one to hand him over in this country. I'm not at liberty to give any such information. The report, on command, will land in Washington with an automatic stamp of secrecy, since it came from me. It will never be released to the press for at least the next thirty years. Maybe they will let the State Department see it, and even then it is doubtful. Collect press conference himself? And who am I? Assistant cultural attache. How can a cultural attache have such information?"

"Yes," Orlov agreed, "we almost got stuck. And the guys in Paris recommended him. I have been secretly engaged in such matters for many years, they say, and I am completely clean. Probably, this guy at the symposium was from Interpol. I'm starting to understand now. So, thanks again to you and Berkesov...

I pulled myself together and completely calmed down.

"So what am I going to get a share for?"

"Listen," Orlov lowered his voice again, "I know that you will soon be returning to the States and will work in the central office. On Larsson, the world did not converge like a wedge. We know a few more people. They take, however, more expensive, but let's not waste time on trifles. We will send the goods to you through Cuba. The trail there is old and reliable, and this bearded asshole Castro knows nothing about it. We put his security organs. So take care of yourself. We have buyers in the States, but your country is unpredictable. Anything can get into the press. Some idiot prosecutor or fanatic customs officer. And all sorts of coincidences. Can you cover from your office? That's what you get commission for. Legal opportunities are full to pay off any scandal and puncture.

"Dangerous business." I shook my head doubtfully, pretending to consider the offer. Your situation is politically very unstable. By autumn, the dollar will probably be about five or six thousand rubles. And this, whatever one may say, means the end of everything. Like a person, the temperature will go off scale for forty-two degrees - and death. So talking about some kind of long-term business in this country is extremely reckless.

"Nothing," Orlov said firmly, "don't worry. We'll sort it out soon. The one we need.

- Restore the party? I asked, smiling nastily.

We need this party! Orlov cursed obscenely. "They ordered me to keep three former regional committee secretaries on staff so that they would not die of hunger. My deputies. One for general issues, one for personnel, the third I don't remember who. The main thing for them is to sit at the table in the office with the phone and do nothing. And thank God. Because any work is able to fill up in six seconds. Let them sit and die. Their time is gone forever. Even without them, we will establish such an order that no one will utter a word. Without any parties there and Jewish Marxisms, - he suddenly laughed, - and these regional committee idiots, you know what they do? They write denunciations against each other. I have a whole closet already full. Scream.

He pushed the smile off his face.

- Well, how is it? Agree?

"It's a good thing," I agreed, "but they don't do it that way. You must come to the States. I will put you in touch with the right people. Let's talk. It only seems to you that the matter is simple. And in

In the United States, there is a whole underground market for such, as you put it, spare parts. If you appear on this market and bring down prices, then you will immediately go to hell and no one will save you. And your Cuban trail is not at all suitable for this purpose. I am telling you this as a friend. Here it is necessary to act through Nicaragua. So you just need to come to the States in person with product samples and talk to people. ("And then I'll hand you over to the police," I thought, "and put you in prison for thirty years that way!")

Orlov wrinkled his brow.

- Yes, I was going to visit America somewhere in July-August. Fine. Where can I find you?

"Don't worry," I said, "it just seems to you that you can come to us without anyone knowing about it. Even along the Cuban trail. I will find you myself. You can be calm.

- What are you so open about? Orlov looked at me incredulously. - Are you tired of serving?

"Tired," I admitted, "but what am I talking about? That we trod this Cuban path for you? You might have guessed. But you are really being honest. Are you afraid that I will betray you? Maybe I already recorded our entire conversation on tape?

Orlov smiled with only the corners of his lips. The eyes were cold and cruel.

- Not afraid. Firstly, I can tell you something very interesting about you. Secondly, you love money very much. Thirdly, you remember Dick Clancy and the masturbation spider well, and fourthly, you simply do not have a tape recorder with you.

"Maybe we invented a tape recorder that your control indicator in your jacket pocket does not respond to?" I laughed.

"If you had invented such a thing," Orlov laughed in response, "I would have known about it before you did." You don't take us for fools at all. You are not the only smart one.

Here Orlov was mistaken. We had some things they didn't know about. Not only did they not know, but they could not even guess about their existence in their materialistic medieval swamp. I had one of these things with me. No, she didn't record conversations. She was meant for something completely different.

IV

In the morning, when I was driving to the consulate from our residential building on the Petrograd side, my phone crackled in the car. I thought it was Kramp, but I heard Berkesov's voice, although we considered machine phone numbers to be secret.

"MacIntyre," the Colonel asked, "where are you?"

"Crossing a bridge," I answered, suppressing my surprise. — Good morning, Colonel.

- Could you come to my place? Then the matter took an interesting turn, - and without waiting for an answer, he added, - park the car on Zakharyevskaya, this is the former Kalyaeva, you should know. We have a parking lot there. And go to the KGB reception. You will be expected there.

I was met by one of Berkesov's fellows and again took me to some kind of elevator, led me along the corridor past the "Drawings of Our Children" stand (the children drew mainly shepherd dogs and pistols) and led me into some office half the size of Berkesov's, where I was the day before.

Judging by the size of the portrait of Dzerzhinsky, the office belonged to some head of department. But Berkesov himself was sitting at the desk, and opposite him was a pretty woman of about thirty-five, rather decently and elegantly dressed.

Seeing me, Berkesov said:

- That's just a comrade arrived, who is closely involved in this matter. So, Zhanna Nikolaevna, please, do not be too lazy to tell me everything first.

"Zhanna!" flashed through my head, "Zhannette!" Without undressing, I moved a free chair to Berkesov's table and sat opposite the woman.

— I'm listening to you, Jeannette.

She blushed.

- Friends sometimes call me Jeannette. How do you know?

"Pure chance," I said, "speak, I am listening to you attentively.

The woman's story was amazing. It turns out that she met Coyote at the exit of the Chernyshevskaya metro station. She immediately recognized him as a man who had been shown on TV the day before and called one of the phones attached to the TV ad. She was invited to come to the reception room, where a friend listened to her, and then took her to Vasily Viktorovich. So she is already repeating her story for the third time.

"Where did this man go, you didn't pay attention?" I asked.

"I did," the woman replied, "I even followed him a little. He got out of the subway and walked down Pyotr Lavrov Street. It's called something else now, but I can't remember.

"Furshtatskaya," prompted the all-knowing Berkesov.

"Yes, yes," Jeanne nodded her head, "he walked along this street and entered the building of the American consulate.

I jumped up in my chair in surprise.

Berkesov looked expressively at me. If I were in his place, I would look even more expressively.

- You do not confuse anything? I muttered, trying not to look at Berkesov.

- I confuse? About what? she asked.

"About the American consulate!"

Jeanne showed surprise with her whole face:

- How are you confused? There is such a huge American flag hanging from the balcony and a policeman at the entrance to the booth. Yes, I know this place well. I often walk past from work.

"Are you sure that it was the same person who was shown on TV?" - at

I still had a glimmer of hope, which, as you know, is the last to die.

"I'm sure," Jeanne said firmly, "he is. And the scar is in place and the description fits. His face is so..." she hesitated. - Like an artist. Such a cute one. He it was
Certainly.

- Do you speak french? I asked unexpectedly even to myself.

She blushed again.

Why are you asking about this?

"To know," I replied coldly, thinking of something else.

"No, unfortunately," Jeanne sighed. "And my ancestors were indeed French. They came to Russia in the 18th century. My surname is Ruanova, and my great-grandmother also had the surname Rua. De Roy.

"That's beside the point," Berkesov intervened and called. A tall guy entered
civilian clothes.

"Zhanna Nikolaevna," Berkesov smiled kindly, "I'll ask you to go with a friend to the next room. He will bring you coffee and cakes there. And you, please, put everything you told us in writing. And then another comrade with a TV camera will come and you will repeat everything to him. Agreed? And don't worry about work, I'll write you a certificate that you were with us on a very important matter.

- What about the reward? Jeanne asked. - They said on TV that the reward would be in foreign currency ...

"There will be, there will be a reward," Berkesov said quickly, "here is a comrade," he pointed to me, "he will contact his relatives." They will pay the reward.

"And what is your name," Jeanne asked me, "and how can I find you?"

"Call Vasily Viktorovich," I answered through gritted teeth, "and ask Mikhail Eremeevich. It's me.

"Thank you," Jeanne replied and left the office to present her testimony in writing.

"So he's hiding in your consulate?" Berkesov asked, looking at me with a mocking look. - Very interesting!

"You know, Colonel," I answered, trying to save face, "I'm not sure that this lady does not receive a salary in your department.

Although I was sure it wasn't.

"That's as you wish," Berkesov shrugged his shoulders, "but if something happens, you can be sure that her testimony will be heard on all media channels. You didn't even get rid of Kennedy completely, and if two presidents are killed at once, you can imagine what will happen to your office.

- What about yours?

- What will happen to us? He laughed evilly. We have such a reputation that nothing can harm us. You'd better go to the consulate and find out what you have there Coyote

is engaged. And then tell me if you want.

If this is a provocation by the KGB, I thought, then it is very cleverly conceived. They can pull out not only one Ruanova as a witness. Such witnesses can now go one after another. And everyone will tell how Coyote was seen going in and out of our consulate. And then shots will be fired and an incredible scandal will break out, the end of which will be the nuclear missiles of Saddam Hussein.

I returned to the consulate and showed Coyote's photograph to the Marine sergeant on duty in the lobby.

- Did this person go to the consulate?

The sergeant looked at the picture.

- Yes, sir.

Have you looked at his papers? I asked, thinking that if the consulate were blown up now, I wouldn't be at all surprised.

— Looked, sir. He has a Swedish passport in the name of Larsson. I think Gustav Larsson, sir.

- Who did he go to?

- To the general department. To Mrs Graves, sir.

I rushed to the office. Joan Graves, smoking her usual long cigarette, read something from the teletype tape. When she saw me she said:

- Bush, although he lost the election, but behaves like a real man.

"He was always a real man," I agreed, "especially when he was director of the CIA. But tell me, Mrs. Graves, if a certain Swede called Larsson spoke to you today.

"Oh yes, Mr. McIntyre," she snapped, "sorry, for God's sake. Yes, Mr. Larsson came and asked me to give you a letter.

- To me? "Today was a day of great surprises.

"Yes, you," Mrs. Graves replied, handing me a thick blue envelope. I called you, but you were not there. And Mr Crump has gone somewhere.

I carefully took the envelope by the corners. On it was written in sweeping handwriting: "To the Assistant Cultural Attache of the United States Embassy in Russia, Mr. D. M. McIntyre." And at the bottom was a small red stamp with the image of a flower.

My first thought was: did Coyote send me a bomb in a letter? After thanking Joan, I went to Crump's office and checked for explosives in the envelope. Unless Coyote was using some new invention, there were no explosives in the envelope. Then I checked the fingerprints and was rewarded for my efforts! There were Coyote's fingerprints on the envelope! At first I didn't even believe it. He smoked a cigarette, sculpted himself in his hands and carefully checked everything again. There was no doubt. Coyote brought the letter. This circumstance shocked me so much that I even forgot to open the envelope. And when he did this, taking all possible precautions, he was even more surprised. The envelope contained a bound "Plan-list" of events of the "Knowledge" society in honor of the 40th anniversary of the victory

Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War, released in 1986. I could not find any fingerprints on the pamphlet, but among its pages I found a newspaper clipping, judging by the type, from the International Herald Tribune. It contained the following message:

"Stockholm. (UPI) Renowned surgeon and pathologist Dr. Larsson is arrested here on charges of illegal practice. Dr. Larsson is known in Sweden and abroad for his human organ transplant operations and theoretical work on the technique of donor organ preservation. A police spokesman declined to comment on the issue: Larsson's lawyer told reporters that he was sure of his client's innocence, and added that any trip to Russia now could compromise anyone, since the most unexpected proposals can be expected from the Russians. they know international laws, and ignoring the laws of their own country has always been something like a national sport for them, the lawyer said.

I re-read the note several times, even looked at it in the light, read the text on the back, where there was a piece of some kind of advertisement for the hiring of stenographers, and without even checking if there were coyote prints on the clipping, I lit another cigarette.

So, Coyote is in Petersburg. He got away from surveillance, but did not take advantage of this to leave the city and show up, as we assumed, in Moscow. Moreover, certainly knowing that they are looking for him, that his photograph is shown on local and central television several times a day, he calmly wanders around the city with the documents of a man already arrested in Stockholm. He knows me, it turns out, and, no doubt, he also knows that I have come here to neutralize him at worst, and at best to destroy him.

Nevertheless, he goes to the consulate, guarded by Berkesov's men in police uniforms and our marines. Berkesov's officers, who have undergone a special briefing, do not recognize him and let him into the consulate. Of course, there is little demand from your marines - no one has told them anything, and they do not watch local television. But Coyote boldly walks through the cordons and even, instead of simply handing the letter to the desk sergeant, goes up to Mrs. Graves and hands her a letter for me, demonstrating his knowledge of the fact that I am not at the consulate. What would be; if Mrs. Graves said, "Now I'll call Mr. McIatire. Give him the letter and give it." Or, say, Krump. But Krump wasn't at the consulate either!

In other words, the audacity of this man is incomprehensible, especially since it is completely not in the spirit of the Coyote. He always worked clearly and efficiently, but was alien to cheap effects. Otherwise, his visit to the American consulate cannot be called anything other than a cheap effect. Perhaps this move was prompted to him by Berkesov with the main goal of compromising the United States in future events? After all, only Berkesov knew that neither I nor Kramp were at the consulate. Only with the help of Berkesov can Coyote so easily wander around the city, where he is wanted by all law enforcement agencies! Then it's really bad. This means that Berkesov has an order to temporarily hold Coyote in St. Petersburg, compromise the CIA, and at the right time ensure that Coyote arrives in Moscow to complete the assignment. This means that Berkesov and Klimov work for us only within the framework that the Monster has designated for them. It follows from this that all sorts of surprises are possible with Saddam's missiles.

But, on the other hand, why did Coyote bring me the clipping about Laroson's arrest in Stockholm, slipping it into that idiotic pamphlet of the all-Union Knowledge Society? It would be more logical in this scenario to write me a letter with something like this: "McIntyre! I left them and await your orders" or something like that. For some reason, he was afraid to leave his fingerprints on the glass (if Berkesov had not erased them) "and then on the envelope he brought me a whole collection of prints and actually reported on Larsson's arrest. At the same time, he

confirmed that he was not Larsson, and showed that he was also aware of my visit to Orlov. So that I don't worry? In addition, he confirmed to me that he is a Coyote, if I still doubt it. The envelope could be prepared without prints, which would be much easier than with a glass. Things were clearly taking a crazy turn. I wrote a cipher to my superiors, where I shared my doubts about Berkesov's loyalty to the cause of "freedom and democracy", and also briefly outlined the story of Coyote's adventures in St. Petersburg during the two incomplete days of our joint stay in the city. Then he called Berkesov.

"He did visit the consulate," I said.

"I have no doubt about it," the Colonel replied. - Ruanova is not one of those people who can come up with such exciting stories.

"I have a question in this regard, Colonel," I admitted. Why didn't your people who are sitting in the booth at the consulate seize him?

I thought that Berkesov would now start brainwashing me that the consulate was guarded by the usual police guard service, which did not receive any operational information, especially such secret information, but the colonel, it seemed to me, only sighed and answered:

- They are now writing to me explaining how this could happen. To be honest, it surprises me too.

I told him about the fingerprints on the envelope and about the newspaper clipping with the message from Stockholm.

Berkesov was silent for a while, then, noticing that all this was very interesting, he asked to contact him in the evening. Perhaps there will be news.

Resting my feet on the low coffee table, I continued trying to tie all the threads that had led to Coyote ever since he had entered town, and I thought of Ruanova again. At first glance, everything in her story was quite simple: an announcement on TV, a chance meeting with Coyote on the subway, a stone's throw from our consulate, and yet there was something strange about it all. Exactly what, I couldn't say. I couldn't say, but somewhere in my subconscious I felt that it would be nice to interrogate Ruanova without Berkesov, even if she works for him. No, of course, I believed in chances, but I knew from experience that most accidents are motivated, and unmotivated accidents are almost always staged.

My intellectual pastime was interrupted by the appearance of Chris, who asked if Crump had come. In the morning he went somewhere to the Department of Culture. I looked at her with a meaningless look, which she apparently understood in her own way and said that she would bring me coffee in a moment.

I, waking up from my thoughts, dialed the phone of a paid city information and found out the address of Ruanova. For some reason it seemed to me that her address would not be given to me. The address could have been removed from the Berkes' certificate, Ruanova could not have been registered in the city, it could not exist at all, and so on. But the address was given quickly and without any difficulties. Ruanova lived on Udnikov Avenue. I looked at the diagram. It was the northeast area of new developments. There was no phone number at the address. I wanted to go right away, but something incomprehensible kept me. Apparently, I still did not fully understand why, in fact, I would go to her, dragging a whole train of Berkesov's people behind me.

At that moment Crump arrived and Chris brought coffee.

"Mike," Crump asked me, "would you like to work off some of the money you get paid as an assistant cultural attaché?"

I looked at him questioningly.

"Tomorrow our exhibition opens in the Hermitage," explained Kramp, "some engravings and paintings from the time of the first settlers. I don't really know anything myself. Would you like to attend the opening as an official representative of the embassy?"

I didn't want to go to museums and open exhibitions now, and I was about to send Frank to hell with his proposal, when suddenly Chris jumped up from her chair as quickly as if she had sat on a nail.

"I remembered," she almost screamed, "I remembered where I saw this guy!"

- Whom? I didn't understand. What happened to you, Chris?

- Go to hell! she shouted at me. "I remembered where I saw that terrorist you came here for, Mike!"

Frank opened his mouth in surprise. I did not see myself, but, apparently, my face did not shine with a complete understanding of what was happening.

Do you mean Coyote? I asked.

- Well, yes! Chris replied. - Do you remember, I said on the day of your arrival that I had already seen him somewhere ...

- Yes, yes, I remember ... And where is it?

- I saw him in the Hermitage, that's where! Chris blurted out.

— In the Hermitage? Frank asked. — What was he doing there? And in general, how could he get there if he was not yet in Lroda?

"I saw him in an engraving," Chris explained. Think what you will, but this is him.

Chris said that, unlike us spies, she is a professional art historian, and therefore knows by heart all the wonderful museums of this city and, first of all, the Hermitage. She has a lot of acquaintances there among researchers, custodians of funds, restorers, and so on. Not so long ago, one of her friends showed her a whole collection of French prints from the mid-18th century. These engravings are not on display at the museum, but are kept in storerooms. It was on one of these engravings that she saw the image of Coyote.

"It's still good," I laughed with a feeling of some relief, "if he is there on an engraving, then at least he won't steal anything and set fire to the museum itself. That would be a shame, because, as you know, the Hermitage itself is currently a joint venture actually owned by the United States.

I thought Chris was offended.

"Aren't you interested in what I said?" she asked.

"Thank you, Chris, for the information," I said as good-naturedly as possible, "it is certainly very interesting. I will remember this and keep it in mind.

- What will you mean? - Chris was so excited, as if it really was about some important business or discovery.

"If we still don't find the Coyote, I'll reveal Berkesov's secret of his whereabouts in the Hermitage vaults in parting. I think that it will also amuse him before being removed from his post.

"And you don't even want to look at him?" Chris hissed.

"Some kind of nonsense," I thought, "marasmus. Coyote on an 18th century engraving! However, why not? After all, we accepted the fact of his resurrection, deciding for our own convenience that he never died, although evidence of his much more than resurrection."

Nevertheless, I still did not want to go to the Hermitage. Well, there is some fine fellow on the engraving, similar to Coyote, even very similar. Even if it's him. What will it give me? If I report this to Washington, it will be the fastest way to retire. At the last thought, I laughed and, in order not to offend Chris, said:

"Well, if you both insist so, then of course I'll go. And I will open the exhibition, and look at the engravings. All this, of course, is curious. Even very curious..."

And I remembered again that Professor Larsson had spoken exactly in French on the phone. I spoke with someone from a vegetable store, where no one now really knows how to speak Russian.

V

A lot of people gathered for the opening of the exhibition. The mayor of the city Alexander Topchak was also present. In an elegant suit with a dazzling smile, he resembled the owner of a prosperous casino somewhere in Los Vegas or Monte Carlo. He has his own city. apparently, he considered it as a profitable casino, since they stopped removing snow from the streets even near the Hermitage. And on this brightest pearl of the former capital of the Russian Empire, on the beautiful creation of Rastrelli, traces of general devastation and desolation were clearly visible. Water drips, dirty glass, crumbling plaster, half-rotten electrical wiring.

In a kind of apathy, everyone was waiting for the Hermitage to burn down one fine night, just as the Library of the Academy of Sciences burned down recently, making it possible to write off thousands of stolen books. According to our information, the flow of theft from the Hermitage, which began immediately after the Bolshevik coup, never stopped, taking only various forms. Now, in an era of complete anarchy and lawlessness, there was only one hope that the American co-owners of the Hermitage would take measures to prevent its final looting. Or, on the contrary, they will plunder it completely. The modern school of forgery, based on holography and laser technology, could inflate any expertise.

The mayor shook hands with me, saying that he was very glad to see me again and that it was very kind of me to come to St. Petersburg to personally open the exhibition. I answered in English through an interpreter, saying that it is always a great pleasure for me to stay in this beautiful city, the fate of which is entrusted to such wonderful hands as the hands of Mr. Topchak. Topchak was pushed to the post of mayor by the same KGB directly from the professorial department of the law faculty of Leningrad State University - the forge of personnel for the same KGB.

After the so-called "putsch", the grateful Topchak quickly turned the mayor's office into a branch of the KGB, spreading the most odious figures of the former communist secret police into various departments and committees of the mayor's office. After that, according to Crump's reports, the city was

put on stream and plunder. How much money they have earned over the past year and a half, no one knew - neither in Russia nor abroad. State racketeering, racketeering from racketeering, arbitrary tax policy, privatization according to the laws of the high road, the creation of obscure commercial and banking structures, substructures and substructures for laundering party and criminal gold, which, having merged into the general stream, elegantly flowed into Western banks, more and more plunging one of the most beautiful cities in the world into a quagmire of poverty and desolation. With his usual easy elegance, the mayor and his team, made up of former KGB officers and party functionaries, privatized a city of millions, not really caring whether or not the population would die out from exorbitant prices for food, medicine and housing.

Petersburg, however, was by no means an exception. Things were going on in Moscow even worse. The difference was that Moscow, as an indisputable center, was weakening, while regional megacities were becoming stronger every day and reacted very sluggishly to shouts from Moscow, if they were heard.

After the collapse of the USSR, St. Petersburg remained virtually the only Russian seaport in the Baltic, and this circumstance made it much stronger than Moscow. Through the port was Western aid, which in Europe was called humanitarian. Western romantics, spending millions of dollars on this assistance, believed that they would go free of charge to the unfortunate population of at least St. Petersburg. But it was humanitarian aid that was stolen by the city authorities with some incomprehensible rapture. It was resold to commercial stalls, of which there were almost more in the city than residential buildings, stored in secret warehouses, exchanged for alcohol and land, resold again, but at exorbitant prices. Any petty official of the mayor's office considered it his duty to steal as much humanitarian aid as he could fit in his apartment, dacha or garage.

Even the Orthodox Church, which with great difficulty received from the authorities part of the humanitarian aid for the poor and needy, became the object of a grandiose scandal when it turned out that local church hierarchs stole six million rubles of this aid without giving their

flock not a damn thing.

That is how this country agonized. But the port worked. If he accepted humanitarian aid, flour and raw sugar, then no one knew what he sent. And what is most interesting, no one was particularly interested. And everything imaginable left the port: oil, coal, ore, all kinds of rare and non-ferrous metals, unique technologies in which Russia managed to overtake the West during the years of confrontation. And, of course, weapons and drugs. Although an alternative route to nearby Finland and the Baltic countries was already open for drugs. The latter, who so long and pitifully dreamed of their independence, having gained it, suddenly turned into global smuggling transshipment bases with a racist ideology.

I was convinced that the port of St. Petersburg should be somewhat larger and deeper, as we say. Hamburgsky, Russia would have already been swept to the bone and life in this country would have ceased. But Saddam's missiles could go through that pipe like a match through a sewer. The excitement of making money is like no other. The experience of our country in this regard is very indicative, but even it could no longer compete with Russian roulette, in the drum of which there was now only one cartridge, and even that one was blank.

Deprived for seventy-five years of the possibility of normal human activity, the Russian nomenklatura, sensing real incomes, lost their heads. And since trading was practically everything, they began to sell their own country in bulk and at a difference, not at all thinking about either moral or political consequences. The people, on which they are accustomed to look only in an ornament of prickly

wire, a people who never had any rights and never received them, again driven into a quagmire of poverty and lack of rights with one illusory reliable survival, of course, did not participate in this cheap sale of their country, naively rejoicing that they themselves had not yet become an object sale and purchase, as often happened in the bloody and savage history of this country.

All this worried me because, despite all the assurances of loyalty, the local authorities, seduced by some large commissions, would take me and cheat me by firing missiles at Hussein, thus getting both from us and from him. And Coyote, it is possible, did not come here to kill anyone, but rather to help someone earn money by stealing, say, one of the ruby stars of the Moscow Kremlin.

It was enough to listen to General Orlov to understand in what immoral state the former Orthodox kingdom met its historical end...

Thinking in this way, accompanied by a whole crowd of invitees, I moved through the tarnished medieval splendor of the Hermitage to the hall where an exhibition of graphics from the first hundred years of the existence of the North American colonies - the future United States of America was unfolded.

Topchak, walking next to me, it turns out that he spoke to me through an interpreter. I did not understand this at once and was quite surprised when a young lady with long flowing hair, addressing me, cooed in tolerable English:

"How long are you in town, dear Lord Macintyre?" Why don't you come to me? There are some very interesting proposals.

I looked dazedly at the girl and only then realized that Topchak was speaking through her mouth. We had met before, so he knew that I spoke Russian, to put it mildly? no worse than him. But since he decided to speak to me through an interpreter, it means that he knew what he was doing. I didn't reply, lost in thought.

Finally, I was placed in front of a microphone and in front of the muzzles of several video cameras resembling Stinger missile launchers.

I cleared my throat and began to ramble on about the cultural convergence of our peoples, about a new world order based on love and trust, not on suspicion and hatred, about the future of a planet redolent without wars and upheavals in the economic prosperity of the free market.

The girl-translator translated me quite freely, referring to some piece of paper, on which, apparently, everything that I had to say was already written. Unexpectedly for myself, like Professor Larsson at the symposium, I switched to Russian, causing Topchak to raise his eyebrows in bewilderment.

"This exhibition will show you," I said, "how our distant ancestors, leaving their houses and property in the old world, broke through state cordons and hurricanes of the Atlantic to the land they considered promised. They landed on this land solely with faith in God and in their own strength, having only an ax and a musket. And I assure you, unlike how it is seen from the height of today, there was no romance in their lives. There was only hard daily work and every minute dangers. The entire history of our country is a history of conscientious labor... Entire generations of Americans have worked tirelessly to make the United States a great world power. And when the Americans were prevented from working, they took up arms. This is the reason for the uprising of the colonists against England, the military measures against Mexico and Spain, the civil war and the participation of America in two world wars. The American people are accustomed to work and do not like

to interfere with it. As a representative of the United States Embassy, I open this exhibition in the hope that the industrious Russian people, who have never been allowed to work freely or enjoy the fruits of their labor, will finally have the right to both, remembering that despite the difficult situation, in which Russia now finds itself, it is still much easier than the situation in which the first American settlers found themselves. But they found a way out in work, which I wish for you all. And God help you!

I must admit, my speech did not cause any enthusiasm. Someone patted for decency, but everyone's faces remained very lean. My call for free labor obviously did not please anyone present. None of them wanted to work, especially with an ax and a musket.

Apparently, Topchak didn't really like my speech either, but he loved presentations like no one else. In general, now in Russia, presentations were arranged for any occasion, especially if at the same time it was possible to shush in front of foreigners, and at the same time shake currency out of them. Against the background of a general hopeless life in a country with half-lit littered cities with garlands of beggars in underground passages, with tens of thousands of homeless refugees, with kilometer-long lines for groceries and with three-four-digit prices for basic necessities, with the collapse of hopes in the bloody environment of ongoing peripheral wars, these presentations with delicacies inaccessible to the public and long forgotten, with women in evening dresses and diamonds, with self-satisfied men in European suits and tuxedos, looked especially ridiculous and defiant. However, they were even often shown on television, and the press literally savored them, detailing the cost of drinks and snacks, admiring the necklaces, earrings and hairstyles of the women present and the capital of the men, some of whom were already learning to ride and play golf.

I was handed an invitation card to the next presentation, which was to take place tomorrow at the Mariinsky Palace on the occasion of the opening of some next joint Russian-American enterprise in the city. But the exhibition also did not remain without a presentation.

In one of the adjacent rooms, decorated with tapestries and gilded candelabra, a table was laid for a few selected people, including the mayor himself, the director of the Baltic Shipping Company Marchenko, who appeared from somewhere, several other people with nomenklatura faces, as well as Chris, Kramp and myself. . Chris gave me a pointed look at the door. Taking advantage of some of the turmoil that is inevitable before the start of any banquet, we slipped out of the tapestry room, went through several halls, went down somewhere along a staircase, much more modest than the front one, and, passing along a long dark corridor, entered a room lined with cabinets and shelves. .

"Lena," Chris called, "are you here?"

From somewhere behind the shelves appeared a woman of about forty with a pleasant, but somehow tired face. I noticed that in recent years, Russian women, regardless of age, have tired faces, like people who have ceased to understand what they live for. Lena and Chris, I noticed, had a very good relationship, as they even kissed.

"Meet me," Chris said in her terrible Russian, "this is my friend Mike."

"Very nice," Lena replied.

I nodded modestly.

"Mike would love to see," Chris continued, "those old French prints you showed me the other day. Do you remember the Parisian scenes from the time of Louis XV?"

Lena looked at me carefully.

Are you also interested in the history of France before the French Revolution?

The word "too" indicated that this was what Chris was interested in.

"Yes," I lied, "I even have to write a dissertation on how Louis XV managed to substitute Louis XVI for himself under the guillotine."

Lena smiled.

- It was not difficult, since Louis XV died a natural death.

"Dying on time is also a great art," I agreed.

Meanwhile, Lena pulled out a wide drawer in one of the cabinets, where engravings by French masters of the middle of the 18th century lay. The plots were, in principle, very monotonous. At least not for an amateur like me. Palaces, carriages, horses, gentlemen in cocked hats with frail skewers, ladies in magnificent dresses with inconceivable hairstyles, marble stairs and columns, oak trees with implausibly luxurious crowns.

"Here he is," Chris suddenly exclaimed, "do you see him, Mike?"

Under the engraving was the signature - "The arrival of Madame and Monsieur Dauphine in Versailles for a royal dinner on the occasion of His Majesty's brilliant victory over Parliament on January 20, 1771."

The Dauphin, the future Louis XVI, gallantly shook hands with Marie Antoinette getting out of the carriage. All around were frozen in bows. But all this was, as they say, in the background. And in the foreground, with his back to the highest persons, in a cocked hat and a wig, stood Coyote, looking at me with some incomprehensible challenge.

- Who is it? I asked Lena, tactlessly pointing at Coyote.

- This? Lena shrugged. - Don't know. Apparently, some Swiss guardsman. He stands with his back to the carriage, with his head covered. Probably one of the palace guards.

"If he is a sentry, then why doesn't he not only have a musket or a halberd, but even a sword," I objected, "and in general the sentries never stood in such a position, arms folded across their chests. Here are the sentries, you see. They stand along the bars of the palace, and some lined up in a tapestry from the carriage to the entrance to the palace. And everyone salutes with weapons. What about this one?"

"We never paid attention to such details," Lena admitted, "I really don't know. However, this character is also on other engravings."

She rearranged several sheets and showed me another engraving. It showed Coyote in a cocked hat and frill walking along the alley of a beautiful park, and a lady with an elegant sun umbrella walked a little behind him. When I saw her and made out, I no longer doubted that I had lost my mind, apparently from overwork. I blinked my eyes, shook my head like a horse, closed and opened my eyes, remembering whether I had drunk today or not, and then stared again at the engraving.

- What's wrong with you, Mike? Chris asked anxiously, clearly noticing that something was happening to me that could not even be called a strong surprise.

"It's all right," I said, and, pulling myself together, I read the caption under the engraving:

"Mademoiselle Jeannette de Roy walks her beloved lap dog Kuti in the park of Lemanzho. February 19, 1772."

At first I did not notice any lap dog and already decided that Cootie was called Cootie in the engraving, but, looking more closely, I noticed a dog running along the side of the path between Jeannette and Coyote.

"It also doesn't say who he is?" I asked, although the Coyote interested me much less than the woman with the lapdog.

"But on the other hand," Lena declared with some solemnity in her voice, "we know very well who this lady is.

- And who is she?

- This is Jeannette de Roy - one of the most famous women of France at that time. The beauty with whom the princes fell in love, the poetess, whom all contemporaries envied, never ceasing to admire, the philosopher, hated by the church and persecuted for her connection with the devil.

— With the devil? I asked. So maybe this fellow is the devil?

Lena shrugged.

He doesn't look like the devil. At least, on the image of the devil, which was depicted on the engravings of that time.

"And what happened to her then?" Is the year of her death known?

- It is known that the church, represented by the Parisian archbishop, began a whole campaign to harass Jeannette and she was inevitably threatened with arrest, a court of the Inquisition and prison. Then they no longer burned at the stake, but there were many ways to punish witches - not at all the best. But she had quite influential patrons who helped her disappear. According to rumors, she fled to Germany and then to Russia. But these are rumors, nothing more. No traces of her presence in Russia have been found.

Was she of noble birth? I asked, thinking that Zhanneta Nikolaevna looked much more spectacular in an 18th-century dress than in Berkesov's office.

"Oh yes," said Leva, "the Rua clan is very ancient. This is a side branch of Guise.

"So maybe it's a footman, a butler or something like that." I pointed at Coyote.

It was noticeable that all this conversation began to tire Lena.

"Actually," she disagreed with my assumption, "somehow it was not customary in the engravings of that time to depict lackeys in the foreground, and gentlemen, including members of the royal family, in the background. I don't know who this person is, but I don't know everything. It must be that in France they know much more about him. It is easier for you to ask for some French museum, say, the Louvre, than to find it out here. We no longer have experienced specialists who could identify the characters of old engravings, and in France they probably exist.

"All right," I agreed, "can I ask you to make me a copy of this engraving?"

- This is through the management, - Lena said, - you need to place an order, pay ...

"And wait six months," I continued.

Lena smiled tiredly, letting me know that it was not her problem, but kindly handed me a card with the inventory number of the engraving and the number of the storage rack.

Thanking her, Chris and I went out into the corridor.

— Where are you now? I asked.

— How where? Chris didn't understand. "We need to get back to the presentation banquet."
Exhibitions.

"Yes, of course," I said. - You go there, and I'll come right now.

Chris must have thought I was about to go to the bathroom as she walked down the wine stairs without asking any more questions. After waiting a little, I, using some professional skills, got out of the Hermitage straight to Millionnaya Street, hoping that no one had noticed me.

Cars sped by. I stopped the fourth of the passing taxis, believing that not all taxi fleets in the city were served by Berkesov's people. Having given the address to the driver, I noticed how a gray Zhiguli, standing near the Naval Archive, pulled away with the clear intention of catching our tail. We jumped out onto the Field of Mars, turned onto Sadovaya. Zhiguli continued to hang on the tail.

I pulled out twenty dollars and handed it to the driver. He accepted the bill, looking at me questioningly.

— Gray Lada, — I said. - We have to break away.

The driver smiled, nodding his head in understanding. We jumped over the bridge over the Fontanka, crossed Liteiny and went deep into the labyrinth of streets and alleys between Liteiny and Suvorovsky prospects. In one of the lanes, the driver turned under the archway of some house, drove through the courtyard, jumped out on some street unfamiliar to me and, without looking at me, asked me again:

- So you want to Prospect Udarnikov?

I nodded.

At that moment, the radiotelephone came to life. A sharp female voice, apparently belonging to the dispatcher, asked:

— LB 35-17! Where are you at?

The driver picked up the phone.

- I'm taking a passenger to the airport.

"Okay," the dispatcher said, "contact me when you're free.

I had no doubt that they would figure me out anyway. The main thing is that they do not break into Ruanova's apartment after me.

The bulky new buildings of Rzhevka flashed by.

- Where to stay? the driver asked. — We are on Drummers.

"Stop right there," I demanded. - Me here.

I pointed to the first house I came across. But the driver seemed to be completely uninterested. Having famously turned around, raising a cloud of dirt and spray, he disappeared. I wandered along the avenue, trying to determine whether they were following me or not, and at the same time to understand where the house I needed was located.

In the new districts of St. Petersburg, as well as Moscow, in the chaotic numbering of houses and buildings, the devil could break his leg. Some houses had no numbers at all. But contrary to expectations, I found Ruanova's house rather quickly. The house was a block, nine-story and outwardly looked quite decent. Judging by the apartment number, Ruanova lived on the eighth floor. The elevator was there but didn't work. The elevator control buttons had been torn from the panel and hung on broken wires on the floor. The semi-dark staircase, dimly lit, with windows resembling loopholes, was fragrant with bins of food waste, screamed obscene calls from the walls and mourned forlornly with empty electric cartridges with stolen light bulbs.

All of this didn't really shock me. We even have worse apartment buildings in Washington. Here, at least, the ritual bonfires of the black panthers were not burning on the landings, and the slaughtered dogs were not lying - a sacrifice to the harsh gods of the Sioux tribe. Thinking in this way, I reached the eighth floor, found the right apartment and called. The door was opened by Jeanne herself. She, apparently, did not greet - a scarf was thrown over a knitted sweater, her eyes were clearly sick. I was surprised that she opened the door without even asking who was bothering her. And there was no peephole on the door.

She was not at all surprised when she saw me. Like I came here every day for dinner.

"Excuse me," I said, "I need to talk to you, and at the same time give you the promised reward.

"Ah," she said, somewhat indifferently. Are you from the Big House? Your name is Michael...

She stammered, remembering the patronymic I had thought up for myself.

"Just Mikhail or Misha, whatever you want," I helped democratically, going into the apartment.

The apartment turned out to be one-room, but with a fairly large kitchen by Russian standards. If outwardly the houses in the large cities of the former Soviet empire gradually began to look relatively decent, then their interiors still resemble the attics of our dog kennels. So crowded, uncomfortable and not human. The first stage of human civilization: slow resettlement from barracks to prison cells.

"Come into the room," Jeanne invited, "would you like coffee?"

Mindful of the rule never to eat or drink anything outside the residency (especially now in Russia) unless absolutely necessary, I politely refused and went into the room.

The room was furnished in the standard way: an ottoman sofa in one corner, a TV set in the other. A sideboard with some unchanging glasses and glasses against one wall, a small bookcase against the other. Closer to the sofa is a massive closet, apparently with clothes. A few chairs. In the middle of the table, on which stood an ashtray with a smoking cigarette. Nearby is an unfinished cup with a drink, which in this country is considered to be tea.

"Sit somewhere," Jeanne suggested, taking a cigarette from the ashtray and sitting down on the sofa.

I sat down on one of the chairs at the table. Then he pulled out two fifty-dollar bills and handed them to Jeanne.

"Your reward," I explained.

She wasn't at all surprised. She took the money and put it on the sideboard. I just asked if I needed to sign somewhere.

"No need," I waved my hand, "I just need you to answer a couple of questions for me."

- I'm listening to you, - Zhanna took out another cigarette from the pack. I gallantly flipped the lighter, then lit a cigarette myself.

"Are you sure that you saw this person," I showed a photograph of Coyote, "exactly at the Chernyshevskaya metro station?"

"Of course I'm sure," Jeanne replied.

The question I formulated was not, of course, so hot, how smart, except for the fact that I asked it in French and Jeanne answered me in the same language.

"And where is he now?" I asked again in French.

Her inflamed eyes opened wide in some incomprehensible horror, as if I had grown fangs of a dracula. She breathed heavily and almost screamed, damn me!

"Where is the person you met at the subway that you told us about at the Big House?" I repeated the question.

Instead of answering, she jumped up and rushed to the kitchen, from which sobs were heard that threatened to turn into hysterics.

I could not foresee this in any way and was somewhat confused, which happens to me very rarely. Putting out my cigarette, I did not find anything better than to also go to the kitchen and try to bring the situation under control.

Jeanne sat at the table, covering her face with her hands. Her shoulders shook. The kerchief she had wrapped herself in slipped to the floor.

On the kitchen wall, attached with sticky tape, hung the same engraving that had been shown to me two hours earlier in the Hermitage - "Mademoiselle Jeannette de Roy walks her beloved lap dog Kuti in the park of Lemanzho. February 19, 1772." With Coyote in the foreground. Coyote wasn't in the kitchen, but Kuti was. She stood on her hind legs, putting her front paws on her mistress's knees, and squealed plaintively. It was her squealing that I took for Ruanova's hysteria.

No longer thinking about whether I was crazy or not, wanting to ask a lot more questions, I said in Russian:

- Calm down, for God's sake! I'm not going to do you any harm. I need know...

- What do you want from me? She removed her hands from her face. Her eyes were completely insane. "I don't know where he is!" she screamed. "If I had known, I would never have come to you. I was hoping you could tell me where he is. He..."

She sobbed again, covering her face with her hands.

Did you see him at the subway?

Without removing her hands from her face, Jeanne nodded her head.

Why didn't you come to him?

"Do you think," she said in French, without taking her hands off her face, "do you think it's so easy to pick up and go up to him when he doesn't want to?"

She raised her tear-stained eyes to me and said unexpectedly calmly:

— Sorry, Michael. Nothing, I'll calm down now.

- Well, - I agreed, sitting down at the table, - but who is depicted on this engraving?

She smiled through her tears.

"This is my great-great-grandmother.

— And the man?

Something incomprehensible appeared on her face. A smile is not a smile. Some kind of smile.

"What, you don't know?" It is he.

"Who the hell is he?" I jumped up in my chair.

It seemed to me that Jeanne wanted to answer something, but at that moment Kuti burst into such barking, which only small dogs like lapdogs and Spitz are capable of.

- Kuti, Kuti, - Jeanne began to stroke the lap dog, - Kuti, calm down, dear!

She herself seemed to have recovered completely, and I hoped to have at least a dozen questions answered.

"Now," Jeanne said, "I will bring the cigarettes from the room.

She left the kitchen. Kuti ran after her.

I remembered that her cigarettes were left lying on the table in the room. Why I let her out of the kitchen instead of offering her my cigarettes I have no idea. However, she could always refuse, saying that she preferred the brand of cigarettes she was used to.

At the very moment when I began to think that Zhanna was looking for her cigarettes for too long, the lights went out throughout the apartment. Only the gleam of lights from the windows of neighboring houses somewhat diluted the ensuing darkness.

- What's happened? I got up and groped my way into the room.

No one answered.

"Zhanna Nikolaevna," I said loudly, "what happened?"

Silence. I didn't have a flashlight with me, of course. I've been too relaxed here lately, riding the former obkom ZILs and black KGB Volgas.

I clicked on the lighter. The room was empty. If the house was old, I would suggest some kind of hiding place in the wall. But in such houses, only bugs and cockroaches can hide between the walls. I even looked into the closet, into the closets in the corridor, into the bathroom combined with the toilet, and went out to the balcony, tearing off the door sealed for the winter.

The apartment was empty. But Zhanna could not go anywhere, because, sitting in the kitchen, I saw the hallway and the front door.

Feeling for the switch, I found that everywhere the switches were simply in the "off" position. Including in the kitchen. Someone just turned off the lights in all areas of the apartment. At the same time, I noticed that Ruanova's coat, her scarf and hat had disappeared from the hanger in the hallway. It turns out that she simply slipped out of the apartment so as not to answer my questions, and did it in such a way that I, like the last donkey, did not notice anything. Then it turns out that she just went for a walk with Kuti. Or something like that.

I turned off the light and I stepped out into the dimly lit area. The door to the next apartment opened slightly and a head in curlers appeared from there. At the sight of me, my head immediately turned back, and I heard a grumpy female voice:

- Again from this whore men go. And everyone is different.

"They took her away in an ambulance recently," answered a muffled male voice, "I saw it myself. Danilych and I were just going to hack, I look, and they were carrying her on a stretcher. They also tried to shove it into the elevator - but nothing.

- Shove it in! mimicked a female voice. - They push her, but not there. Here just now this one came with a scar. And now - I looked - the criminal is standing, already horror. Should have told the police. This should have been evicted a long time ago. This speculator...

I didn't listen any further and began to descend the dark stairs, feeling afraid. Although there could be no danger. Apparently, what happened now in the apartment had a rather strong effect on me.

I left the house, enjoying the fresh air. I looked around mechanically to see if anyone was walking the dog. Children were rolling between houses from an impromptu ice slide. Several people did walk their dogs, but Zhanna was not among them. Yes, it couldn't be. I understood this internally, but common sense, apparently, decided to fight to the last, slipping one or the other arguments. I lit a cigarette, listening to the screech of children rolling down the hill, thinking about how I can get to the consulate, if possible, also

imperceptibly.

VI

I went out onto a dark, almost unlit avenue. Passers-by loomed in shadows, maneuvering between puddles and snowdrifts. In the distance, raising a cloud of water and mud, scattering blue sparks, a trolley bus passed. I remembered that some kind of trolleybus runs here, which could take you almost to the very consulate. Looks like 49. Or maybe not.

While I was thinking about such nonsense, the black Volga, with a creak of badly adjusted brakes, stopped right in front of me. Major Shepelev jumped out of it.

"Mr. McIntyre," he said, gesturing me into the car, "the Colonel begged me to come. Gave me something important.

Berkesov was gloomy. He reminded me that after all, I was not the commandant of the captured city and I had no right to do such things without the knowledge of the local authorities. Nice things! An assistant to the American cultural attache breaks into the apartments (Berkesov choked on the word "Soviet") of Russian citizens without a warrant and produces

unauthorized search!

"You must be overtired, Colonel," I said. - What are you talking about? I, like all my compatriots, are exceptionally law-abiding, especially in a foreign country. I went to Ruanova's to give her a reward, which, by the way, you promised, but I had to pay.

- And what? Berkesov asked. - Passed it on?

"In my own hands," I said, "exactly one hundred dollars."

- Do you have a receipt? - an expression appeared on Berkesov's face, characteristic of every person who is lied to in the eye.

- Are you going to compensate me for this money? I asked curiously, not understanding the reasons for his irritation. Without any sanctions, I also visited objects other than a one-room apartment on Rzhevka.

"So do you have a receipt that you paid a reward to citizen Ruanova in the amount of one hundred American dollars?" the Colonel did not hesitate.

"I don't have a receipt," I replied, also beginning to join.

If this is the very "important matter" for which Berkesov ordered me to be brought to him, then I would prefer to go to the consulate and have dinner. I haven't eaten since morning.

"It's not customary to take receipts for such small sums, Colonel. If she sues me, I'll give the judge another ten dollars so that he won't accept the lawsuit.

Berkesov blushed and played with his jaws, apparently restraining himself. Then he leaned back in his chair and, I thought, smiled.

"I'm just surprised," he said, "that you, with your experience and capabilities, allow yourself such punctures. Only North Korean intelligence works on our territory using similar methods. This method is called "Juche". What were you looking for in Ruanova's apartment? Why was it so romantic to disappear from the Hermitage? Who were you hoping to find there? Coyote?

I almost answered in the affirmative that I had not only hoped, but also discovered, but restrained myself and asked:

"Still, I don't understand at all, Colonel, why are you so excited? Well, I went to Ruanova. I had to ask her a few questions that I did not have time to ask in your presence, and did not want to, if you like. After all, she is the only person who saw Coyote after your valiant subordinates missed him in the underpass.

For a few moments Berkesov silently looked straight into my eyes. He probably worked out this view when he was still an ordinary investigator and "split" poor intellectuals for reading anti-Soviet literature.

"For your information," Berkesov rapped out slowly, "Ruanova is in the hospital with a heart attack, which she had on the evening of the same day when she came here. You apparently did not know this when you entered her apartment? So they would ask me. It would be easier than jumping out the window of the Hermitage toilet.

I was dumbfounded:

- All right, Colonel. I haven't lost my mind yet. What nonsense are you spouting? I didn't "penetrate" Ruanova's apartment. I called and she opened up for me. Personally. And I talked to her...

- That's why they walked around the apartment with a lighter, rummaging through cupboards and pantries. And then just turn on the light? – Berkesov's eyes showed obvious disappointment with my mental and operational abilities.

I must say that if Berkesov wanted to confuse me, then he achieved his goal. If they followed me from the Hermitage itself, then all the events, including the light that suddenly went out in the apartment, can be interpreted in a different way.

Suppose that under the cover of darkness, Ruanova managed to sneak out of the apartment unnoticed (although this is unlikely, but let's assume). She left the apartment, where Berkesov's guys grabbed her (if she herself was not one of the "well done"), and now they can show me anywhere: in the hospital, in the morgue, in New York - anywhere and in any condition. What, what, and the KGB always knew how to do such tricks admirably.

But I remembered a conversation coming from behind the door of a neighboring apartment, that Ruanova had recently been taken away by an ambulance. Although this conversation, including the head in curlers, could have been staged. I did not demand evidence from Berkesov, because I was sure that if the colonel assures me that Ruanova is in the hospital, then it must be so. The question is, when did she get there?

Naturally, I recorded the conversation with Ruanova on tape, but I absolutely did not want to present this spit to Berkesov. First, I had no right to demonstrate our new technique to him. They may have already stolen it from us, but there has been no confirmation yet. So if they find out about her existence, at least not from me. And secondly, I simply did not want the content of our conversation with Ruanova to become known to Berkesov. So far, from his words, it was clear to me that they were sure that I was alone in the apartment, and therefore they could not record my conversation with Zhanna. And it was encouraging. And sometimes specks fly into the all-seeing eye.

"All right, Colonel," I said, "perhaps we shouldn't hide it from you. Yes, we've received intelligence that this woman may have been Coyote's accomplice. Since she is a Russian subject, I did not want to cause her trouble. In other words, I didn't want to approach you for assistance without first checking the data I had.

Berkesov was silent for a while, then asked:

"And you assure me that you found her at home?"

- Yes. I found him at home - I felt that Berkesov was not lying, and therefore I wanted more and more to understand this devilry.

And did you talk to her?

And talked to her.

- About what? May I be curious?

"I'll tell you about it later, Colonel.

Berkesov sighed and picked up one of the handsets.

- What do we have there with Ruanova? he asked wearily. - In the hospital. Check if she's in the hospital or not. So what, what's in intensive care? Check, I told you, and report back to me.

The Colonel looked at me again, as if to make sure that I hadn't disappeared, and then he took a folder from the table, opened it and pulled out two sheets of handwritten paper, to which two photographs were attached with a paper clip. Berkesov separated the photographs from the sheets and handed them to me.

These were photocopies of engravings that I looked at in the Hermitage, and the sheets, apparently, were Lena's explanatory note: why did I come, what did I look at and what did I say. The KGB, of course, is simply a delightful office!

— Did you look for it in the Hermitage? Berkesov sighed again. He always sighed when he did not fully understand something.

"Yes," I admitted.

— How did you know that we have such engravings in the Hermitage?

"I'm still an assistant cultural attaché, Colonel!"

"Have you examined Ruanova's kitchen?"

"I looked around," I nodded, "and I saw everything.

"And what do you think of all this?" Berkesov took the photocopies and put them back in the folder.

I didn't have time to answer when the selector spoke: "Vasily Viktorovich," the self-confident baritone reported, "we checked. She is in the hospital, in intensive care. A ward for two. The condition, as the doctors say, is moderate. a detailed medical history with the application of cardiograms.

— Why is that? Berkesov did not understand.

"You ordered..."

"I ordered," the colonel got angry, "to find out if she left the hospital or not this afternoon.

"She was transferred to another ward," the baritone was somewhat confused, "but she could not leave the hospital. In this state? What are you, Vasily Viktorovich!"

— Do you think so? Berkesov asked sharply. "Or are you sure you're reporting?"

While the colonel was arguing with the selector, I scribbled a few words on a piece of paper and handed it to Berkesov.

The baritone who spoke was obviously not in the hospital himself and reported from someone's words:

"All right," said Berkesov, "listen now to what I'm going to tell you." Go immediately to the hospital. Give the head physician my request to transfer Ruanova to a separate ward. Your people should be: two at the entrance to the ward, two in the ward, two under the windows and two on the roof. A total of eight people. All are armed. Anyone who tries to enter the ward tonight, or who is under the windows or on the roof, is immediately detained and quickly brought to me. Be extremely careful. Keep in touch with each other and with the regional department. All clear?

Meanwhile, in my note it was said: "Establish, just in case, round-the-clock surveillance of her ward."

"You could drive a couple more tanks in there," I quipped.

But Berkesov's thought was already working in a different direction.

Do you think he might be there?

"Perhaps," I shrugged, "but it is unlikely that we will be able to detain him.

- And why is that? How else can you do it! You don't know us very well, McIntyre!

"You missed him in broad daylight on the Nevsky Prospekt," I reminded him once more.

- It was an accident. There was no light in the underground passage," Berkesov blushed at my tactless reminders.

"There will be another accident," I predicted, "so take my advice, Colonel: one person in the ward is more than enough.

"You didn't answer my question," Berkesov remembered, "what do you think about all this?"

- About what?

"About these engravings, about Ruanova, about Coyote. Why did you even start your search with the Hermitage?

I did not want to admit that I came to the Hermitage quite by accident, opening the exhibition, and that Chris had informed me about everything else.

"It's a long story," I declined to answer. "The only thing I can say for sure is that he won't kill anyone except..."

- Ruanova? Berkesov interrupted me with a question.

"It's also doubtful," I replied, congratulating myself for underestimating Berkesov, if his thought is capable of following in that direction, "he would have killed her long ago if he could or ... or had the right. While it is difficult to understand anything. So far, it is clear that he did not come here to kill.

"You will report to your superiors." When you are expelled from the CIA, I will take you to my office as an ensign at the entrance to check documents.

"You are very kind, Colonel," I thanked Berkesov. "Unfortunately, if the opposite happens, that is, if you leave your post, I most likely will not be able to help you with anything. Even to ensure the personal safety of you and your family. As well as yourself.

- What are you about? Berkesov was wary.

- Yes, - I sighed this time, - after all, information from all regions of Russia flocks to us. And I can assure you, there is nothing good in this information. I sincerely hoped to go on vacation and not come back here again, if not for this idiotic story with the revived Coyote. And this story, Colonel, is getting more and more incomprehensible. if he only dealt with Ruanova, it could still be somehow, if not understood, then comprehended. Old love and all. Remember the phone call your people intercepted? But why the hell did he come to our consulate to give me his fingerprints and a clipping about Larsson's arrest in Stockholm?

At the mention of Larsson's arrest, Berkesov's eyes glazed over for a fraction of a second, and for some reason he did not find anything better than to ask:

"You know Orlov, don't you?"

— General? I know.

"It turns out," Berkesov explained, "he called Larsson to organize a modern diagnostic center in the city. But he unexpectedly left for his homeland, where he was also unexpectedly arrested. Perhaps we immediately went on the wrong track.

"Most likely," I agreed, wondering if Berkesov knew about my meeting with Orlov. - We immediately got confused. And for one reason: Coyote is dead. Perhaps the miracle of the resurrection took place in the case of Christ, but in this case, I don't really believe in it.

"But remember how it all began," Berkesov reminded. "You get an order about the Coyote from your superiors, put off your vacation, and fly here. I, in turn, receive instructions from Moscow to provide you with full assistance in neutralizing all possible actions of Coyote, his arrest or liquidation. And in reality it turns out that we are dealing, at best, with some kind of legend, which I, with all my desire, cannot take seriously, despite everything that I personally witnessed. Do you get the impression that you and I are being distracted from something?

"If they're distracting, then you," I said, "why distract my attention if I already have a ticket to Paris and I'm out of the game for at least six weeks while on vacation. And, excuse me, colonel, I don't see any such cool things in your region that require the introduction of global disinformation, and even the combined efforts of the two most powerful intelligence agencies in the world: the CIA and the KGB.

"ICBMs," Berkesov reminded.

- Don't be a pedant. ICBM - one name. Nothing happened to your beloved KGB. Better tell me: you will not break the oath very much if you briefly tell me what kind of business your subordinates were doing before my arrival. Could this be the key to this whole Coyote story?

- My business? Berkesov asked. "Well, what can I do for you?" I do not see anything global in them, although they are interesting. A drug trail from Colombia to Afghanistan and back has been laid through the city. The stigma is down for everyone: both the executive branch and the legislative branch, that is, the Soviets. The Vyborg highway and the commercial port are especially used. I monitor the situation, but do not interfere. So ordered by Moscow.

"We know that," I said. "Go on, if possible."

- Through the city there is an export of currency to Western banks from a whole network of joint ventures registered not only in the city, but throughout the entire territory of the former Union. All this is deposited in foreign banks in various accounts. Again, we monitor the situation, but do not interfere, cutting off only a trifle trying to cling to the general flow. But even this little thing provides us with round-the-clock work.

"It's all really a trifle," I agreed. - You could also add that your trading port turned into something reminiscent of the island of Tortuga in the 17th century, which was controlled by five pirate groups at once, operating under the auspices of five European powers and not yet created by the United States. As much money goes through the port every month as we spend on the Pentagon in a year.

Berkesov blushed.

"I'm not allowed to touch Marchenko yet," he said, "but I'll slap him soon." He's already lost his sense of proportion...

Marchenko at one time, even under the communist regime, served as head of the Baltic Shipping Company. After the collapse of the regime, he quickly transformed the shipping company into a joint-stock company, managed jointly by him and a non-existent German company, of which Marchenko himself was a representative. The money was pumped without any taxation through the so-called "World Lab" - another fraudulent organization created in the wake of the ecology craze.

Of course, Marchenko did not act autonomously. He gave about 75% of his astronomical profits to Moscow. Figuratively speaking, of course. But in practice, he placed them on foreign currency accounts of specific individuals in the Supreme Council of the country and in the apparatus of the government and the President, which had grown about three times after August 1991.

We knew that Berkesov was going to slam Marchenko, because lately, the naval chief of St. Petersburg, apparently, having gone into a rage (big money blinds), has ceased to share with his high-ranking accomplices. That is, not that he stopped at all, but arbitrarily reduced the percentage of taxation from 75% to 60%.

In addition, he dared to hide the luxurious Western limousines intended for relatives of the chairman of the Supreme Soviet Khasbulatov and the chairman of the constitutional court Zorkin. It was already too much. From Moscow followed the order to Berkesov to deal with the affairs of Marchenko. So far, with everything "healed", including currency and cars. But he, according to my information, bit the bit, hoping for help from the powerful local mafia, entrenched in the mayor's office and city council. However, Moscow, although weakening every day, was still much stronger,

"And that's not it," I said, "even if we connect all the events taking place in the city together and add to this the creation of armed formations on the basis of the defeated Baltic riot police and the so-called Russian legion, which, as you know, are designed to protect the unimpeded passage through the city of drugs, weapons and currency, even if we add to this all the deeds of the godfather of the city and regional mafia Lodyrev, then this is still no reason to recall me from vacation.

"You won't die of modesty," Berkesov remarked, "but your awareness of the affairs of our region amazes me ...

"Yes," I confirmed, "I know a lot, even about the Rhapsody store on the former Zhelyabov Street. What is it called now? I forgot. Still, I have been actively working in this city for quite a long time.

- Konyushennaya, - Berkesov grumbled, since he was one of the co-owners of this antique store, the official owners of which were released by him from the pre-trial detention center with a suspended criminal case "for smuggling on an especially large scale," to quote the criminal code.

The Colonel's eyes became sharp. He smiled wryly, but found the strength to laugh it off.

"It's time to get you out, McIntyre. You know too much.

- It's useless, - I waved my hand, - all my knowledge is in the computer. Any of my successors, who just yesterday graduated from the accelerated courses of cultural attaches, will immediately master all this knowledge. And you have a wonderful proverb: you can't shoot everyone. It is not even translated into any language in the semantic meaning.

For some reason, Berkesov looked at his turned off computer and said:

— You might think that the information gets into your computers directly from outer space. It's just that the whole Lubyanka is teeming with traitors...

He broke off, but I did not deny myself the pleasure of remarking:

"It's the inevitable consequence of losing the war, Colonel. However, do not be offended. We have a saying: only defeat can be worse than victory. There is nothing good in winning either. We did not expect much of what we faced when the USSR collapsed. Perhaps we would have acted differently had we known the consequences. What we now know a lot about you all serves only one thing: to prevent the affect of dominoes. If Russia falls apart after the USSR, and falls apart, as you all understand, into about a dozen nuclear microstates, then the world cataclysm will become a much greater reality than in the case of nuclear missiles falling into the hands of your friend Saddam. We will pull out these missiles from him together with our arms and legs, but I'll be honest, Colonel, I don't know what we will do with you. And the story of the Coyote worries me only from this point of view. Now a good shot and Russia will fall apart like a house of cards. And I want to connect the events in such a way that I understand this whole idiotic story with Coyote and Ruanova, my arrival here, your behavior, colonel, in the light of, say, four "black options." Do you know about them?

"Of course," Berkesov confirmed, "although I'm not sure that we read the same texts.

"Probably the same ones," I said. Mine may have been a little more detailed. But these are details. Could one of the "black options" be implemented in St. Petersburg? It is in St. Petersburg, and not in Moscow, as everyone thinks. And Coyote, or whoever he is, has come to town in connection with these events that are coming.

"Then it turns out," said Berkesov, "that your superiors in Washington know much more than they told you. You can make a scandal, because by the status of a resident you have the right to all information in the area of responsibility. You are being removed from Moscow and transferred here to catch the Coyote, perhaps also so that you in Washington do not learn something from the central computer that you are not yet supposed to know. And here you will sit indefinitely, because, it seems to me, no Coyote exists. This is all a chain of hoaxes, the purpose of which will soon become clear.

- Do you think so? I asked, admiring the fact that Berkesov, among other things, is also a good intriguer, which I had not noticed in him before.

"Yes," Berkesov confirmed, "you can say to your face and behind your eyes as much as you like that we, as a security service, are worthless and outdated like the Austro-Hungarian police, but we know our worth. Perhaps, somewhere at the global level, you are right, but as a detective, we know our business. And you could be convinced of this, more than once. So, I'm telling you: I, Colonel Berkesov, say that there is no Coyote in the city. If he was, perhaps we would not be able to take him, but we would already know where he is. And he did not leave the city, I can also confidently tell you ...

"Following your logic," I interrupted him, "he didn't come to town?"

"And he didn't come," Berkesov agreed. Larsson arrived. He managed to escape observation. This happens, especially when you consider what pitch darkness reigned in this transition. And then Orlov sent him home. This, I confess, could not have noticed. He has such a network that, if desired, he can take even the Winter Palace abroad.

It seemed to me that Berkesov stubbornly reduced the conversation to General Orlov, as if expecting some kind of reaction from me. I was itching to ask Berkesov, how did he allow the creation in the city of a parallel network of some kind of underground security service headed by a former KGB general? If he knows about it, then why doesn't he liquidate this network? But I decided to get away from this topic and answered:

"You don't put it very convincingly, Colonel. And who did Ruanova meet at the subway? And who came to see me at the consulate?"

Berkesov shrugged his shoulders - they say you know better, but said aloud:

- The policemen who were on duty at the consulate did not see a person resembling Coyote that day. And Ruanova is just crazy with all these engravings, family legends. Does anyone look like anyone? If you climb into these jungles ...

He paused and said with a laugh:

"About ten years ago, we spent a certain eccentric on the 70th article. I don't remember his last name. He, too, was into all sorts of damn things. If you like, I'll have him tracked down and we'll bring him in as an expert. He will quickly figure everything out, but if then you are sent to a madhouse, then do not blame me!"

"I like your optimism, colonel," I confessed, "sit on a powder keg with a lit wick, and rejoice like a child. It seems that you have years of life ahead of you, and I'm not sure that you have even half a year. I'm not talking about you personally, of course. And about Russia. You are a regional figure. Don't want to think globally..."

"I don't want to," the colonel objected, "but I'm not supposed to think globally. And don't worry about the Coyote. I have expressed my personal thoughts to you. And no one canceled the order to catch him. We will catch."

"Catch," I agreed, "only hurry, please." I want to go on vacation. And in general: I would prefer to observe the continuation of all your affairs from Washington.

VII

I found myself thinking that because of all the events of recent times, I no longer treat the Coyote with the seriousness that he deserved. At least until his death. The behavior of the person who was considered Coyote did not at all resemble the behavior of the real Coyote.

If you think sensibly, then what should Coyote do in today's Russia? Kill presidents? But to be honest, Coyote's methods are already hopelessly outdated. A scoped rifle won't work now. Today, sophisticated methods are needed. Even cooler than those with which Prime Minister Gandhi was removed. Not a mother (she was shot by her own bodyguard), but a son who was killed with a live bomb. Yes, and live bombs are also outdated. Special bouquets of flowers (smelled and died in two hours) work better than a whole company of Coyotes. And flowers are also not the best way in our age of such a rapid development of new technologies. Come to any public meeting with the president, just get closer to the stage or podium (and this is very easy), stand there for fifteen minutes, carefully listening to the speech of the head of state, and he will die in the evening.

It makes no sense to remove ours, since, one might say, he is no longer president. And theirs? What he is, what he is not! Go find another one. In the scheme of anarchy, he is simply an ideal figure, and it was possible to remove him, if someone needed it, without resorting to such an expensive tool as the Coyote.

Thinking in this way, I walked from the Berkes department a short way to our consulate, although the State Department categorically did not recommend moving around on foot and unaccompanied in Russian cities. It's categorically. But I'm still not a diplomat. And there were no instructions from my department on this score, except for one: the resident leaves the residency only in case of emergency. But they themselves sent me to catch the revived Coyote. Here I am catching.

I knew Leningrad-Petersburg well. It seems to me that for a foreigner it is even very good. I started here once as a resident in the North-West of the USSR, and I had a lot of time to find out what I wanted and learn what I wanted. The main thing is to want something and then everything will work out. And now, more than anything, I wanted to go to Paris, and from there - home. Damn him, this Coyote and all his 300-year-old mistresses.

Despite the late hour, I was heading precisely to the consulate, intending to contact Trokman and convince him that I was not needed there at all to catch Coyote or whoever, and try to find out from him - what the hell did he drive me to Petersburg?

To my surprise, I found Kramp at the consulate. He looked worried. Firstly, for a good half of the day he could not say anything about where I was, and, secondly, I could not really explain to him what I had been doing all day. As a result, I told him that throughout the day I had been solving various issues with Berkesov, which was exactly half a lie. I tried to laugh it off and advised Crump to watch an old Soviet film, just as titled "Missing Resident". However, Crump was not at all inclined to share my so frivolous mood and, after a pause, he told me:

"Listen, Mike, something serious is starting here. Ben-Zvi appeared in the city.

It was really a surprise.

— Yitzhak Ben-Zvi? I asked, as if there was another Ben-Zvi.

Yitzhak Ben-Zvi is an Israeli intelligence resident in Russia. Unlike me, who was in a semi-legal position, Ben-Zvi, of course, was a "deep illegal".

The fact that Israeli intelligence is actively operating on the territory of Russia, of course, was not unusual, especially given the specifics of today. On the territory of Russia, and first of all, in such large cities as Moscow and St. Petersburg, various intelligence services simply rubbed against each other. I'm not talking about my own office, but now the whole spectrum was presented here, motley, like a bazaar in Cairo. North Koreans, Vietnamese, Iraqis, Libyans, Palestinians had not only their own powerful residences here, but even prisons and concentration camps. Intelligence agencies of European countries - English, German and French - were respectably located in first-class hotels, renting entire floors there. In the north-west of the country, the young Baltic intelligence agencies, especially the Lithuanians, were increasingly active. In Moscow, the intelligence services of the former republics of the USSR were already comfortably located and stretched in all directions.

Fighting them under these conditions was useless. Only in Moscow and the nearest suburbs lived, but according to the security service, more than 120 thousand unregistered foreigners. There were about 80 thousand of them in St. Petersburg. Not a single counterintelligence agency in the world could cope with such a state of affairs without resorting to mass deportations, raids, wholesale arrests and searches. General Klimov assured

me that the KGB is monitoring the situation and even, taking the opportunity, introduces its own people into these intelligence services. But I had a hard time believing in it.

However, if it was impossible to keep track of the details, then we and, of course, the KGB (I deliberately call the Russian security service by its old name) at least knew the goals that this or that intelligence sets for itself in its activities on the territory of Russia and in the republics former USSR.

I have already said that we - that is, the CIA - were in the most difficult position, since we were faced with exclusively strategic tasks. Any reconnaissance is always more inclined to solve precisely tactical tasks, since they are immeasurably easier. For example, the same KGB, although it acted and not without success in almost all countries of the world, did not fulfill the tasks of a global nature, since they were not even formulated.

Nobody, even in the KGB itself, took the slogan about the worldwide victory of communism seriously. Therefore, for the past twenty years, the KGB has been mainly engaged in stealing military and industrial secrets from us, which we hardly interfered with, knowing full well that they will not be able to copy most of our technology, and that what they can copy will be obsolete by then. In Third World countries, the successes of the KGB continued, as a rule, until the first crop failure. After that, a pro-American coup spontaneously took place in the country, to the great, I must say, our displeasure, since we had to feed this country.

After the collapse of the USSR, the United States remained the only guarantor of international security. If I write about this with some pride, then I assure you that without any enthusiasm. Being alone, even in global loneliness, is always uncomfortable.

Half a century of confrontation between the nuclear superpowers was spent pumping up muscles in order to deliver a blow to their enemy at the right time, from which he would not have risen. As in the final of the championship among professional boxers. The excitement of the struggle blinds, the thought works feverishly: either we are them, or they are us. No one really thinks about what happens when the enemy can no longer stand up?

I have read hundreds of Scenarios about the possible development of events in the USSR after the collapse of communism. All forecasters clearly foresaw the collapse of the communist ideology as utopian, unnatural and misanthropic. But only a few at the same time saw the inevitable collapse of the empire, which could exist only under totalitarian rule. And it could have been foreseen. No empire has yet been able to exist in a democracy. As soon as England introduced democratic institutions of government into her colonies, everything fell apart in them.

As a result, as I have already noted, two main tasks were set for the CIA: to prevent the spread of former Soviet weapons of mass destruction around the world and to prevent Russia from disintegrating into a dozen nuclear states. With the first task, we coped with sin in half, but with the second, the situation was much more complicated. There were a lot of hunters to destroy Russia after the USSR, and, worst of all, there were a lot of ways within the framework of the so-called "black scenarios". These are the two global challenges we faced.

As for tactical tasks, there are almost none left. All the latest military and civilian technologies, not to mention samples, were shown to us by the Russians themselves. For the most part, in the hope that we will buy something, but, to be honest, there were many things that created the preconditions for fruitful joint work in the future. Russians were far from being only imitators and copyists everywhere. Mainly, of course, in the military and

space development and a little in medicine. Everything else was dominated by the early Middle Ages.

All other intelligence agencies, fortunately, did not set themselves global tasks. The intelligence agencies of NATO (including joint intelligence) and the industrialized countries "helping us solve global problems" mainly conducted intelligence on the vast Russian market, "issuing almost purely commercial recommendations to their governments.

The Far East of Russia was virtually monopolized by Japanese intelligence, which again set itself the task of an economic offensive, perfectly worked out in the post-war decades. Japanese intelligence coexisted superbly with Chinese and North Korean intelligence there, since their tasks did not overlap at all.

The Chinese looked at the opposite bank of the Amur with a clear desire to someday take it into their hands with most of the Russian Primorye, the North Koreans assessed objects for future sabotage actions, looked for new types of weapons and strategic raw materials, perfectly using the large Korean diaspora in Russia for this. The actions of North Korean intelligence were very similar in terms of the methods of action of Japanese intelligence on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, but were carried out on a much larger scale.

However, unlike the Japanese, the Chinese and Korean intelligence services were very active in the European part of Russia. At the same time, Chinese intelligence officers actively cooperated with their own criminal element, who reached Moscow on their own and dreamed of surrounding Moscow with several rings of the so-called "Chinatowns", where no counterintelligence could penetrate.

Other intelligence agencies were engaged in the export of weapons and prohibited raw materials to their countries, they did not disdain even the slave trade, kidnapping people right on the streets. Some had the simple task of constantly creating an atmosphere of tension, actively collaborating with the criminal world, engaging in outright fraud, like the Lebanese, setting goals for sabotage when necessary, bringing chaos to an already barely living financial system, or even simply stealing everything that lies badly, exporting oil and rare metals, weapons, gold and precious stones in echelons; created all sorts of joint ventures, stock exchanges, joint-stock companies, fake firms, fake banks, opium smokehouses and brothels.

The police intervened only when a clash of various intelligence agencies from far and near abroad led to shooting in the streets or in public places, grabbing, as a rule, small game, which did not even know who it was working for. The KGB "monitored the situation", but in this game it got so confused that it simply put all this spy-financial mafia on tribute, which was paid meekly. And if we take into account that on the other hand, a horde of officials from a wide variety of state institutions from the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Defense to the Sanitary Inspectorate stuck tightly to this web, then any attempt by the KGB to carry out any operational action ended in just exposing a small group of corrupt officials who They couldn't say anything because they didn't know anything.

This is how Russia moved from totalitarianism to a free market. It was like a swimmer trying to swim across the Amazon while being attacked by packs of piranhas. Long floats on the river skeleton...

I dwelled in such detail on the activities of various intelligence services on the territory of Russia, not only in order to give a general picture of what is happening in the country, which could

clouded by my learned conversations with Colonel Berkesov, and in order to emphasize that in this kaleidoscope of international espionage, Israeli intelligence occupied a very special place, and its resident Yitzhak Ben-Zvi was a person about whom a little more detail should be said.

Ben-Zvi was born in 1939 in Kaunas. He was not even a track years old when the Nazi Wehrmacht captured the city. The family managed to escape from the city and little Yitzhak was sheltered out of pity by the forester. His mother and father wandered through the forests from farm to farm for some time, then they were captured. The father managed to escape, but the mother died. Father, after a lot of adventures, more than once on the verge of death, eventually joined a Jewish partisan detachment, formed by that time in the Baltics.

Such a detachment was formed because ordinary partisan detachments, especially those controlled by Moscow, either did not take Jews at all, or took them according to a quota - no more than 5%. At the end of 1944, my father managed to find Yitzhak from the forester, and he took him to the detachment. It was the same famous detachment that made its way from the territory of the Baltic states to Palestine, leaving corpses and ashes on its way.

There is a version that the detachment passed through the battle formations of the Red Army not without the help of a secret instruction from Comrade Stalin, who, apparently, will forever remain the world record holder in the number of delayed-action mines planted under his own ass. When the detachment reached the territory of present-day Israel, the Haganah's war with the British was already raging with might and main, which passed without any interruption into the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948, during which Yitzhak's father also died, and the boy remained in the care of the state.

As the boy grew, so did the surprise of his mentors. From a thin, downtrodden and frightened Jewish child who miraculously survived the Holocaust, a fair-haired and gray-eyed giant has grown up, who does not have any of those external features that are mistakenly considered Jewish. Such guys, and even those who know Russian, have always been valued in Israel above gold and diamonds. Yitzhak was taught what he needed and was quickly thrown into the USSR with fake documents and a legendary biography.

When a biography is legendary, the most important thing is that it should not be flawless. In this case, many intelligence agencies outplayed the KGB in their post-war activities. This worked only in the USSR, where an impeccable profile was valued much higher than the personal and professional qualities of the interviewee.

Yitzhak was invented along with a new name and surname - Vasily Dmitriev - and a bunch of compromising evidence: there was living in the occupied territory during the war years, and missing parents, dispossessed relatives, and a penchant for petty criminal acts with a fifth-grade education. It would never occur to anyone to double-check such data. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi settled in Sverdlovsk, where he quickly legalized himself, receiving a year in prison for hooliganism.

Upon his release, he took a job at some factory in the municipal utilities system and quickly became known for his bestial anti-Semitism. In those years, anti-Semitism, like everything in the world, was the monopoly of the CPSU, which did not at all want to share this monopoly with various factory loaders.

But favorable attention was paid to Yitzhak. Meanwhile, Vasily Dmitriev externally graduated from high school and some correspondence university and founded an underground society of zealots of Russian antiquity, where everyone except Jews was accepted. For this, Yitzhak almost received a second term, as a real scandal began in the city. Itzhak was rescued by patrons from the local regional committee, drawing attention to the outstanding organizational

nugget abilities. True, the society was dispersed, but gently, and Vasily Dmitriev was unexpectedly added to the system of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions by some middle boss.

We learned about this quite by accident, when in 1967 the Israeli intelligence itself made contact with us and the then CIA resident in Moscow received a password to contact Dmitriev. Now two people knew about it: me and Crump.

What the KGB knew about this was unknown. Somehow, half-jokingly, I asked General Klimov why such obvious Nazis as Dmitriev and his company are allowed to act completely legally. He replied that this was not the business of the KGB at all, but of the prosecutor's office, and reduced the whole conversation to some kind of Jewish anecdote.

Israeli intelligence differs from all other intelligence agencies in the world in that its goals are not really known to anyone. I don't mean the Mossad, which is an ordinary military intelligence service, in fact, a front-line one, doing everything from capturing languages to acts of sabotage, as it should be. As for the strategic intelligence of the Israelis, it openly declares two main goals: the search for and kidnapping of those responsible for the genocide of Jews during the Second World War and, most importantly, the collection of all the Jews of the Diaspora in the ancient land of Israel.

The first task, which thundered all over the world after the kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann and a number of other actions, such as Heinrich Muller, who was stolen from Moscow at one time, is gradually fading away. Merciless time deals equally with both victims and executioners. The youngest are over eighty. As for the second task, it will last for another two hundred years, at least.

No one is in a hurry, because Moses (and his Pentateuch, according to Israeli spies, is their only written instruction) assigned 503 years from the moment of the revival of Israel to this task. If Moses defined the strategic goal in writing, then David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of a reborn Israel, verbally formulated the tactical methods for its implementation. Every Jew in the world must come to the conclusion for himself that, apart from Israel, there is no other place for him. And he can come to such a conclusion only when the country of his residence will be shaken and feverish by bouts of anti-Semitism.

To do this, it was supposed to use agents who, being Jews, outwardly did not at all resemble the average image of a Jew that had developed over the centuries in the popular mind. The share of these residents included the organization of anti-Semitic campaigns and their financing. Anti-Semitism is a very complex and dangerous thing. This weapon is much more powerful than the tectonic one, which, as all the general staffs modestly assure the public, has not yet been created.

Unlike anti-Semitism, which was created a long time ago and which does not cost anything to smash any state to shreds or, at best, throw any country off the pedestal of a great power into a cesspool of third-rate states. For some reason, it is believed that these weapons are directed against the Jews, but in my firm conviction only Jews know how to really use these weapons. Almost every weapon recoils. But a butt in the shoulder and a bullet in the forehead are very different things. Russia has been shaken more than once, "bent into a ram's horn and smashed anti-Semitism to shreds," but the soil for it is so fertile here "that no history lessons are of any use.

The fault, from my point of view, is the lack of a Russian national idea formulated at least in general terms. The national dream, finally. Let's say, even in such a vague form as we have in the USA: "A country of equal and unlimited opportunities." Russia has never said anything of the sort about itself, and the slogans: "Orthodoxy, autocracy and

nationality" smoothly flowed into the invention of the ideological department of the Central Committee of the CPSU, which has become a worldwide anecdote: "The people and the party are one." , changed to dogs, or even simply exterminated other Orthodox.

Therefore, any attempts to create a clear national idea have always rested on the call "Beat the Jews!", and the matter did not go beyond this. And in parallel there were military catastrophes, riots and revolutions, national catastrophes that threatened to turn (and often turn) into world cataclysms. Avoiding unnecessary details, I note that under the howl of "Beat the Jews!" the Russian Empire collapsed, the USSR collapsed, and now Russia was already writhing, cracking and threatening to fall apart.

When the CPSU was preparing to flee the political scene with all its belongings, it did not find anything better than to start a new anti-Semitic campaign in a dying country to cover up its retreat. The CPSU itself thought of this or it was suggested to it, but under its patronage numerous groups of performers arose, erroneously called the "Memory" society, but in reality united to solve various problems that seemed to have nothing to do with the Jews.

After the collapse of the communist ideology, the main task was to frustrate even an attempt to formulate the national idea of a new Russia, to initially compromise any Russian movement of national revival, to further divide the Russian people along purely territorial lines and, of course, to ensure a constant flow of Jewish emigration from the country.

On this wave, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi quickly turned into a figure of almost international proportions. He was shown on TV, interviews with him were published by reputable newspapers, he spoke at numerous rallies and symposiums, was a member of various Russian cathedrals and unions, wrote articles, walked surrounded by a ferocious-looking bodyguards and, of course, moved long ago from Yekaterinburg to Moscow, where it is noisy he became famous for once driving the next "symposium" off the podium and publicly barking at Vice-President Rutskoi himself.

I was very worried about his activities, if only because in one of the options for the "black scenario" it was Dmitriev's fellows who were supposed to start the crushing of Russia by organizing street riots in large cities. These riots were to be officially called "Jewish pogroms", although Yitzhak, of course, was forbidden to bring things to pogroms, and it was very difficult to organize them at the present time. In the old days, it was not so much the Jews that were smashed as their property. Now the Jews of Russia had no property, except for intellectual property.

The nationalists understood this very well, but it did not bother them. Under the slogan "Beat the Jews, save Russia!" it was supposed to begin the destruction of cooperative and private stalls, served for the most part by people from the Caucasus. At the same time, the slogan "Russia is the Russian government!" was put forward, meaning to nominate Ruslan Khasbulatov, a Chechen by nationality, to the top of power.

The corresponding work was carried out, and Dmitriev's supporters firmly believed that President Yeltsin, and Foreign Minister Kozyrev, and Prime Minister Gaidar, and the mayors of the capitals - Luzhkov and Topchak - were all Jews, hiding under fictitious names. But Khasbulatov is Russian. Such a psychosis in Russia is by no means new. They have had many of these in history. Suffice it to recall how, in the wake of the Russian national idea, the grandson of Peter the Great was strangled and a purebred German woman was placed on the throne, who never learned to speak Russian properly until the end of her life.

I just now lacked Yitzhak and Coyote in the city.

"Do you know anything about why he came?" I asked Crump.

Instead of answering, he put in front of me the number of the Russian Nabat newspaper, legally published in the city, where on the first page there was a cap typed in large, bold letters - "Vasily Dmitriev in St. Petersburg! Tickets to Tel Aviv have jumped in price! Zhids, tremble! ".

Below was a portrait of an aged and stout Yitzhak in a black tunic with a belt and some kind of huge badge, consisting of a two-headed eagle, crosses and bark. On his shoulders were admiral's epaulettes of the old type (that is, gold), decorated with some kind of complex monogram, similar to the monogram of Alexander III, whom Yitzhak was very fond of quoting.

In an interview with a newspaper correspondent, a former instructor of the regional committee of the CPSU, Yitzhak explained the reasons for his arrival. Since the excesses of the Jews on Russian soil continue, as well as the genocide against the Russian people, he came to St. Petersburg in order to put an end to this. With pain in his heart, he sees how the city of Russian military and naval glory, the city of Peter the Great, is overgrown with Jewish shops and taverns. He wanted to address the people from the TV screen, but television is firmly captured by the Jews, and therefore he will turn to the people on Palace Square, where all patriotic Russian people who are ready to overthrow the Jewish yoke are invited.

When asked by a correspondent whether Russia today had true allies, Dmitriev again quoted Emperor Alexander III, who allegedly stated that Russia's only allies were its army and navy, clearly inviting the army to take part in "the overthrow of the Jewish yoke." All this would be very funny if the fate of Russia were not at stake. Is all this being done to induce the Jews to leave this country, in which no one is now preventing them from doing so? It is hardly beneficial for Israel to have people of this type come to power here, under whom Yitzhak so cleverly disguises himself. Or maybe beneficial? The fact of the matter is that no one knew what goals Israeli intelligence sets for itself, except for those openly declared.

"It's all very funny," I said to Crump, "this country has always been saved by a miracle. Let's hope it happens this time as well.

Crump, however, did not at all share my hope for Providence. He had information that behind the Dmitriev gang were the Reds, who, having regrouped their forces, were again striving for political power.

I did not agree with this. It is possible that the Reds, who have always been extremists themselves, are really behind the extremists of all stripes, but these are not the same Reds that left the arena in August 1991. It's completely different. Small things. And those who left are now sitting in the chairs of presidents and vice presidents of various banks, joint-stock companies and joint ventures. Those that are smaller have filled the structures of executive and legislative power, sit at congresses and in city councils. They will be the first to make sure that those Reds who are now yelling in the squares do not have a single chance to seize power again. Those are only fed a little so that they do not die of hunger in the conditions of the market, they give a shout, but this is the end of the matter. There is something completely different here.

On the "red spectrum" I contacted Trokman. He was going to Silver Spring for the weekend and was hyper-nervous.

"How did it happen, Mike," he asked, "that you missed the Coyote?"

"This guy turned out to be more agile than I expected," I answered him at the toy. - He ran down the street so fast and disappeared into the entrance courtyard that I did not even have time to spit out a cigarette butt after him. And there are no taxis around.

"It's all damn interesting," Bill agreed, "especially the fingerprints on the envelope. We checked everything we could here, and came to the conclusion that Coyote is still one hundred percent dead. We even dug up his grave. When he was buried, measures were taken so that he did not decompose too much. So he rests quietly in the grave. Which is why I like this whole ghost story even more.

"Bill," I agreed, "I love ghost stories too, but why would I sit here and call the spirits, especially since Coyote, or whatever he is, is not in town. Berkesov vouches for this and I am inclined to believe him. Can I consider my mission completed?

"Let's do this," said Torkman after a little thought, "after all, for insurance, sit here for another day or two." We have information that our cunning Israeli friends are also showing an increased interest in this story. It is possible that Yitzhak may appear there...

"He's already here," I put in.

— Is that how? Torkman paused. "You know, Mike, Yitzhak never just shows up anywhere. From his movements, one can chart Israeli priorities. If they're looking for Coyote just because he's been hired by the Palestinians a couple of times, then that's ridiculous, of course. So the matter is much more serious.

"Perhaps it was they who resurrected him?" I dared to joke. "Israel is the best place for that. In any case, all resurrections over the past three thousand years have taken place on its territory.

"It's not out of the question," Torkman remarked, "it's not out of the question at all." Anyway, Mike, hold on a little longer. I think the situation will clear up soon. Do you have any non-materialistic version of this story?

- There is a version, - I confessed, - it has already acquired solid details and mysticism, leaving at one end almost in the 18th century.

— In the 18th century? Will asked with a kind of interest I didn't understand. - And where to? To us here in the States?

- No. To France.

Bill was silent again, and the silence lasted a good half a minute, and then more muttered than said:

Of course, to France. An interesting thing happens...

"Bill," I almost yelled, "if you start to understand anything, then fill me in on the matter, at least in general terms. What are you mumbling under your breath?

"Mike," Torkman replied, "listen to me carefully. I can't really tell you anything right now. Not because I don't want to, but because I have nothing to say yet. I began to guess something, but I do not want to share with you, so as not to completely confuse you. The only thing I can warn you about is that anything can happen in Russia right now. Be prepared for this.

"I am always ready for all the unexpected," I reported not very smart, but bravo.

"I have no doubt about it," Trokman agreed, but you must remember that Russia is not just a country. This -

Satan's proving ground!

Part 2

American publisher's preface

For many years I had the opportunity to work in the USSR and then in Russia as an intelligence officer for the United States government. At the beginning, our task was the crushing and collapse of the Soviet Union, and later - the preservation of Russia as a federal state. How we coped with these tasks - let history judge. It may not have been necessary to do either. But such is the fate of our country, I would even say - the task assigned to it by the Almighty, to serve in our troubled world either as a police patrol, or as a fire brigade, or as an ambulance with a field kitchen in tow. And then all of these combined at the same time. Apparently, this is what the Lord intended, creating us at the end of the 18th century and giving us a name - the New World. And God is Light.

I know Russian very well. Many Russians with whom I had to communicate did not believe that my ancestors lived in America even before the creation of the United States, taking me either as a descendant of the first emigration, or as a representative of the third emigration who returned to Russia. It seemed to me that I had an excellent grasp of Russian life, its Byzantine-flavoured politics, and its entire Eurasian chaotic kaleidoscope.

Alas, I was wrong. Like any foreigner, I did not know Russia, did not understand the dynamics and motives of many processes taking place there, which are so contrary to common sense and universal human logic that it was simply impossible to comprehend them. All our mistakes stemmed from an incorrect analysis of the situation in Russia. In each country, historical time is clearly divided into peaceful and military. Such is our earthly history.

In Russia, this division does not exist and, most importantly, never existed. There always, daily, hourly, every minute, the war of all against all raged. This war permeated Russian society in all directions: horizontally, vertically, and even, so to speak, diagonally. This was a war, I repeat, all against all. Its peak has always been in peacetime. This war subsided (but did not stop!) during external wars, which is why there were so many of them in Russian history, since the rulers of Russia saw external wars as a way to end internal wars. They were much more afraid of them.

And the saddest thing is that in Russia there has never been the authority of the Power. The authorities were constantly forced to defend their authority with "weapons in hand" in order to preserve the state and prevent its collapse and the complete chaos of bloody civil strife. This could be achieved only through the creation of rigid totalitarian systems of government, often turning into despotism.

But as soon as some ruler of Russia started playing games of liberalism and democracy, as in

the country immediately began processes that had a clear tendency to overthrow and physical destruction of this ruler, developing into rebellions and uprisings that threatened to completely destroy the state under a pile of anarchic ruins. One gets the impression that the Russian people are generally opposed to any kind of statehood and are ready to put up with it only under conditions of constant cruel terror. In the genes of the Russian people, apparently, the memory of the pre-Varangian times is still alive, when this people lived according to some kind of its own way of statelessness: without kings, tsars, princes, prime ministers and presidents, generated by an alien Western civilization. What was this way of life - history has not conveyed to us.

Driven into the state by the Varangian clubs, the Russians resisted this as best they could, exerting strength over the centuries to destroy the state imposed on them and begin to live, as their ancestors had lived for many thousands of years. This, of course, is a utopia. Without a doubt, life would force the Russians to create a state. But what would that state be like is the question. Would he have such a bloody and illogical history, like Rus', the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union?

These questions are answered by the book of the late General Berkesov, which, with the kind assistance of the American "Slavic Cathedral", we offer to the English-speaking reader. I knew Berkesov well. We had a chance to work together in the days of the collapse of the USSR and later. I think that his book will be useful for diplomats, scientists, and businessmen, in a word, for everyone who needs to understand Russia "with the mind." Although the Russians themselves are trying to convince the whole world that this is impossible.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words about how the manuscript of this work came to me. General Berkesov did not give it to me. I received it after his unexpected death, the circumstances of which have not yet been fully clarified. Received through undercover channels, and this circumstance for a long time did not make it possible to publish a real work.

Now that this book has been published, I state that I retain copyright only in a provisional manner. If any of the relatives and friends of General Berkesov claims their rights to this manuscript, these rights will be immediately legally confirmed and financially compensated.

Finally, my sincere thanks go to John Burdeck and Suzanne Mays for their help in translating and editing this book into English. I am also indebted to Clyde Gorek of the Library of Congress, who helped review and correct some of the points in this book that we did not fully understand. Although there are some things we still don't understand. Let the readers figure it out.

Gerald M. McIntyre

Boston,

Massachusetts

Chapter 1. KGB Investigators

When I was young, I dreamed of becoming a journalist. But fate decreed otherwise. After graduating from school and serving in the army, I entered the law faculty of Leningrad University, after graduating from which I became an investigator in the prosecutor's office. With the help of my friends, who graduated from the Leningrad State University before me, and on the recommendation of the city committee of the Komsomol, in 1975 I was admitted to the KGB, where I was first an operative worker, and then became an investigator.

The investigator of the then KGB was a very peculiar figure. Of course, he, like the investigators of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the prosecutor's office, was obliged to be guided in his work by the Criminal and Criminal Procedure Codes, but mainly he was forced to be guided by the political situation of the moment, which was determined by numerous by-law instructions and directives.

In fact, the investigator had no particular worries. Long before the opening of any next criminal case on the composition of a political crime, the accused and the circle of witnesses were determined. A decision was made on which article of this or that accused should be held, what term to determine for him, and the like. Decisions were made on the basis of witnesses. After this "case", fire him from his job, and in parallel or after that, start a separate "case" with such and such a deadline. People were still walking free, not suspecting that their fate had already been decided at our meetings. So the role of the KGB investigator was reduced to only to the registration of cases that were predetermined. And with the help of the operational services, with which the KGB investigators interacted like no one else anywhere, there was never a shortage of cases.

There were even secret lists of whom and when to plant. Something like a landing schedule. They did not imprison everyone at once, mainly because there were not enough investigators to legally process cases. I was surprised to learn that the entire KGB of such a huge country as the USSR has only about five hundred investigators. It was rumored that this number was specially limited in order to avoid mass, uncontrolled terror, which was feared at the top, mainly out of fear for their personal safety and well-being.

They knew well and remembered how quickly mass terror gets out of control, devouring its inspirers and organizers. I will not claim that this was the case, but I am sure that if there were not 500 of us, KGB investigators, but, say, at least 10 thousand people, this would have happened. All the work that we were assigned for a year, we would have done in a week and would have gone further.

Who were those against whom all our efforts were directed?

Aside from a tiny number of hard-core smugglers, drug dealers, and would-be terrorists (mostly insane), our target was the flower of the nation—its thinking part. I specifically do not use the word "intelligentsia" here, because in this context this term would not be entirely correct. For me, it is generally very vague and incomprehensible. Under our sight was everything thinking. If, say, a simple worker allowed himself to be carried away by something other than drunkenness and dominoes, then he immediately got noticed by us. His behavior was analyzed, connections made and the like, all done with the aim of finding a pretext for isolating him from society.

I remember that I was still quite a novice KGB worker, when materials were being collected for a factory worker, then bearing the name of Zhdanov. The plant was a shipbuilding plant, and the worker - a young guy - was a ship's carpenter, in love with his job. A ship's carpenter is a rare profession these days. And you still need to look for a ship carpenter who is in love with his work! A strong love for one's profession was already considered almost a crime. And then we also learn that this guy, in addition, and an excellent modeller, is interested in warships, collecting postcards with their image.

Russia is generally a country of collectors. Collecting anything: stamps, postcards, badges, coins, envelopes, and even matchstick labels remained practically the only officially unforbidden outlet where people could somehow show their energy and intelligence for self-expression, and not for the victory of communism. I am convinced that there were more collectors in Leningrad alone than in the rest of the world outside the USSR.

It seems to me that if the leaders of Bolshevism were consistent, then collecting anything should have been banned as a petty-bourgeois passion for hoarding and punished along with any anti-social manifestation. For example, under the same famous Article 58, paragraph 15, up to 10 years in prison with confiscation of the collection. But, apparently, the hands did not reach such perfection of the legislation. True, the absence of such an article, to be honest, few people bothered.

When Stalin needed a rare stamp dedicated to Levanevsky's flight for a gift to President Roosevelt, in five minutes the Moscow collector Ershelsky, who dared to own this stamp to the envy of the rest, was sent to a camp for 15 years (where he died). A huge collection was confiscated, one stamp was taken out of it, the rest was thrown somewhere. Somehow I came across the Ershelsky file in the archive, and I looked at how it was framed. (After Lenin's lawlessness, the NKVD, the MGB and the KGB were strictly required to legalize criminal cases. Apparently, for future historians!) It turned out that for evading military service. Agree that for wartime the sentence is more than mild, except for one circumstance - Ershelsky was 73 years old! Therefore, they did not shoot, as knowledgeable people explained to me.

In our peacetime, however, collectors were closely watched, allowing the collection to grow to a certain size, then the owner was arrested for anything. And there was always a reason: for speculation, for unearned income, for speculative exchange (there was such a term), for sodomy, finally. They issued him a term, as a rule, not very long: up to 10 years. The collection was confiscated and sold in special stores at ridiculous prices. So collectors of paintings, antiques, coins, orders and stamps (I'm not talking about collectors of knives and firearms, but there were some!), Constantly walked on the razor's edge and, as a rule, unsuccessfully.

But back to our ship's carpenter. Here the case was special. He collected images of warships in postcards and photographs. Leningrad is officially called the city of Russian naval glory, so there were about 100 such collectors in the city. There were somewhat fewer aviation enthusiasts and even fewer military equipment enthusiasts in general. There was no point in arresting these people because of their penny postcards and photographs and even models. But to lead them on espionage (and if you are not a spy, then why do you need an image of a cruiser or battleship?) - that was a completely different matter!

The fact is that no one in the KGB has seen a real spy for a long time, in my opinion, since World War II. If we were able to capture someone who was proactively offering services to the Americans or our other potential adversaries, then they were sent somewhere: we did not deal with them. But trying to fabricate an espionage case was something we knew how to do, and the authorities always encouraged such zeal, because a fabricated espionage case, if successful, always followed the real thing, bringing with it orders, extraordinary titles, promotions and other pleasant things.

I must say that here we were given a hundred points by the Special Departments of the KGB in the army, which monthly processed two or three cases of espionage (in our Leningrad district), the victims of which were mainly first-year soldiers and sailors, or

who reported in letters to their relatives the name of their ship or the brand of the machine gun, or discussed something in the "smoking room", which indicated their treasonous moods. Everyone was escorted under the execution of the 64th article, but, of course, no one was shot. They gave 5-7 camps for years, but in quarterly reports it was possible to write down: so many enemy spies were exposed, so many saboteurs, in total ...

And we came across only ideological saboteurs. Even the most powerful unit was created: ideological counterintelligence. In a word, we decided to hold this carpenter on espionage, and present all the other "collectors" as a spy and sabotage organization. The carpenter was arrested and 128 searches were carried out in two waves.

My office then resembled the hall of a naval museum: oil paintings of warships, models, photographs, some foreign albums, in a word, material evidence for five major trials. However, nothing happened. From espionage, the whole thing had to be first reclassified as disclosure of military secrets, but then it turned out that this carpenter was not allowed access to any military secrets and state secrets. But it was not customary for us to release anyone. The KGB is never wrong. This

axiom.

I had to issue him 4 years of camps for pornography, although no pornography was found on him. One old, it seems, Italian calendar was found with half-naked women (without any men). But here the experts, thank you, did not let us down. Defined: pornography. That's what they decided on.

But the next case with aviation lovers was carried out in a more organized way. One worker-modeller was also arrested. He was into airplanes. At this point, my office looked like an air show. The mistakes of the past case were taken into account. Come closer. It was found out that he corresponded with the Finn alone. Also with an amateur. This is pure espionage. They issued it for 10 years, and I received my first Order of the Red Star. (And my boss is the Red Banner of War. Recently he spoke at a meeting of NKVD-KGB veterans and said: "We earned our orders with blood. We protected the Motherland from enemies with a shield!")

These cases were bright, but atypical. Special departments stood on their hind legs that we were taking away their bread. All sorts of dirty tricks were arranged for us: they say, feed on our developments. GRU raised a squeal: we are disrupting some operations for them. The bosses at the meetings raged: they say, take care of the Jews and dissidents - you are excellent at that.

Indeed, such cases went by the pipeline. You go to some Jew, find a Hebrew self-instruction manual published in Tel Aviv, and draw it up according to Article 70, part 1: anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. You make out for 9 months. The Jew is sitting in the isolation ward, the witnesses are being interrogated, the salary is coming, the special distributor is working, the ranks are growing.

You go to some associate professor or professor, find Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago, Avtorkhanov's Partocracy, or something like that in his piano or behind his refrigerator, and draw it up according to the same article 70, part 1. Associate Professor sits in an isolation ward, witnesses go for interrogations for 9 months. In short, life goes on. And they were always "pricked" in the same way.

There were three articles in our criminal code: 190th "note", 70th and 64th. They were formulated in almost the same way, but the terms for them were different. Up to 3 years, up to 7 years and 5 years of exile, and right up to execution. The whole snag was in the so-called "signs".

With signs of "weakening of the existing system" or with signs of "treason to the motherland" or without them. Whether there are signs or not, the investigator decided. And honestly about this to the accused

said. I can issue you for three years, or I can bring you under the "tower", as, say, Anatoly Sharansky was almost let down for wanting to leave for Israel. They gave him 12 years and 5 links on the 64th. Orders then fell on the Lubyanka like confetti at a New Year's ball.

A special secret manual came out on how to conduct such cases. In the Big House, everyone just died of envy. But this is by the way. But sitting in front of me is not some really fighter for an idea, but an ordinary layman. He does not understand what crime he committed. Well, I read a book, well, I gave it to others. Well, what of it? Moreover, it was not determined by law which books were prohibited and which were not. This was decided by the investigator. Any book, even published in the USSR 20 years ago, could be considered anti-Soviet.

In Moscow, one excessively zealous professor managed to issue for 3 years for the book of the Marquis de Custine "Nikolaev Russia, 1939", recognizing it as "anti-Soviet" through examination. But what everyone sitting in front of me understood well was that he was in my power. Either he writes down in the protocol what I demand of him, or he is dead. This is in every Russian person's genes. And they "helped the investigation", as best they could. True, there were cases when not everything went smoothly, but these were more exceptions than the rule.

This is how we lived and served in the KGB, following the directives of our favorite party. When I was eager to join the KGB, I had no idea what I would actually have to do.

Meanwhile, the KGB was the only institution in the country where real information flowed, both about domestic life and international achievements. An analysis of this information, even a superficial one, first of all showed that there was such a flow of intelligence information from the USSR to the Western special services, and even real in time, that if our country had a real leadership, and not "Kremlin elders" who had fallen into insanity, then it would have every reason to disperse the KGB, which was doing who knows what. Although you certainly had excuses. We, I repeat, did what the CPSU ordered us to do.

Just at that time, I remember, I was working on the case of the famous priest, Father Gudko, on charges of religious propaganda, which was equated with anti-Soviet propaganda. That is, all the same our breadwinner, the 70th article, as once our predecessors, the 58th was the breadwinner. My office began to look like a museum at a theological seminary; icons, crosses of various sizes, religious books (the whole safe was full of West German and Finnish Bibles), and the like.

We wanted to spoof Father Gudko too: there was a connection with foreign centers of religious obscurantism, but, mindful of past blunders, we decided to formalize him according to the 70th. And then a directive came from Moscow: let him, they say, repent publicly on TV, admit that he served as a front for the CIA and its dirty deeds, and if he agrees, then issue him for the 190th for the term that he has already served, and release.

In connection with this case, I went on a business trip to Moscow to share my experience with the comrades there on how to work properly under Article 70, and at the same time to interrogate several priest witnesses who lived in Moscow and in the region.

I was received by General Popkov, one of the deputies of the KGB Chairman himself. He asked how the service was going, if there were any problems and all that, but in a very paternal way. And then I don't know what came over me, but I laid out to him all my innermost thoughts about the fact that we are not doing what we should be doing. We spend too much effort and money on maintaining the purity of ideology (I chose the mildest expressions), and the enemy takes advantage of this and actually shines through the whole country with X-rays without encountering any organized resistance.

And now I can't say where my courage came from. Apparently, he bought into the paternal tone of the general. In the old days, for such statements they could easily be taken straight from the general's office to the basement and slapped. And now it was possible to fly out of the service "for unhealthy moods" in six seconds.

But the general only chuckled condescendingly and, coming out from behind his massive table, sat down next to me. "Vasily," he said, putting his hand on my shoulders, "you young people always think that we, your senior comrades, have already cut ourselves off from life to such an extent that we don't understand something or don't understand anything at all. All my life I, Vasya, spent on party and Chekist work. He himself was young and also rebelled: they say that we are not doing what we need. This is the common destiny of the young - to consider themselves smarter than the bosses. senior comrades didn't explain much to us. We must understand and figure it out ourselves. If you don't understand, you don't understand, you don't feel in your heart the very core, the very essence of our work, so much the worse for you. there is no place for you among us, and perhaps there is no place at all among the living. It was a harsh time, you know, probably. But I will explain to you, Vasily, the essence of what is happening, because I see that you understand everything with your heart, but not with your head. It's your head that's rebelling, but your heart is ours.

"That's right, Comrade Colonel General," I stammered, stunned by the turn our conversation had taken.

"So," General Popkov continued, "we have one main adversary. You probably think that I'm going to give you a popular lecture on the international situation and now I'll say: our main adversary, America and the entire Western capitalist world in general, is coming "No, Vasya, that's not what I want to tell you about. Russia is a unique country."

I specifically say Russia, not the USSR, so that you understand it better. Always the main enemy of Russian statehood has been its own people, with the stubbornness of wild elements trying to destroy the state in which they live. Only terror and a totalitarian system of government saved Russia from collapse. Therefore, the entire population of Russia was always divided into two unequal parts: those whom the state suited, and those who tried with all their might from the state - not from this state, but from the state in general - to escape, destroy it, destroy it, weaken it as much as possible. Hence our long serfdom, and a vast territory, and constant wars in the hope of re-educating the people, rallying them against an external threat to their very existence. But the main weapon in the hands of the enemies of our statehood has always been the cries of freedom, democracy, elective institutions and the like.

In a country like ours, such slogans have always resonated with millions of people. But as soon as they began to be implemented, the state immediately found itself on the verge of catastrophe and collapse. Therefore, these slogans are more terrible than the tanks and bombers of any external enemy. Much worse, especially now. Let the Americans shine through us as much as they want. Let them steal our military secrets if it pleases them. But they do not benefit from this, just as we do not benefit from the fact that we steal their technological secrets. One moral satisfaction that was stolen. Both for us and for them. Because the nuclear potential, nuclear parity reliably, as never before in the history of mankind, protects the world.

And if one thing can now be said absolutely definitely, it is only that there will never be a war between us and the United States, no matter how irresponsible rulers come to power both with us and with them. Because rulers under certain circumstances can still decide to throw troops and population into the fire even now,

but none of them will ever want to call fire upon themselves. Trust me. They will not want to go to the bunker forever, neither with us nor with them. Nobody. And since there will be no war, then the Americans are not afraid of us.

This means that our own population remains our main enemy, and mainly those who are trying to stir it up, voluntarily or involuntarily, with talk about democracy and freedom. Whoever reads all sorts of books and retells to others, and even multiplies them, distributing them. I personally would shoot such people, but I understand that this cannot be done now. Just start and let's go. But it is simply necessary to isolate them from society. Everyone! Without any pity. How many? Yes, as much as you want. At least half of the country, I say this conditionally. You yourself know that we have less than two percent of them. Let them go wherever they want, let them live in special camps or in settlements, but society is not decomposed. Because on the map is not our fate with you, not the well-being of the Kremlin old people, as many people think, but the fate of the state.

Give them free rein, give real freedom of the press and speech, before you have time to look back, how one memory of our state will remain without any intrusion of the enemy. So let their intelligence here do what they want. Therefore, the main effort is to suppress ideological sabotage. Here in Leningrad you caught several tourists with books. This is very good! Soon we'll get to grips with these wise men. Yuri Vladimirovich will put things in order. You understood me?"

"I understand all this, Comrade General," I said, "I understand that the ideological front is the most important, and ideological saboteurs are the most dangerous. But is our country really such that any liberalization of its domestic political life will lead to disaster and death?"

"Not only domestic policy, but also foreign policy," the general specified. "We have to be aggressive, always threaten someone so that they fear us. Only in this way can we survive as a state. Only in conditions of tough confrontation both within the country and abroad. Even the weak we must be aggressive. Otherwise, we're finished."

I listened to the general as I probably never listened to anyone else in my life. I noticed that he did not say a word about the "immortal ideas of communism", about the inevitable victory of the cause of Lenin, about the greatness of the CPSU, of which we were both members. He spoke only about Russian statehood. He was about 60 years old at that time but he looked younger in his impeccably tailored French suit, elegant West German glasses and Oxford low shoes. His office was decorated with sober Finnish furniture, Japanese TV, American phones and computers. Only the portrait of Dzerzhinsky on the wall was of domestic production.

I suddenly wondered if some Western company was already making portraits of leaders for government offices. And at the same time, the general speaks very confidently about Russian statehood. Does this mean that they agree to fight endlessly with their people, to stop all life in the country, to extinguish all creative impulses, but only to preserve the state, passing under the atom almost completely to Western dependence? My head was spinning. Russia, the state - these were, of course, fundamental concepts for me, summarized in the word "Motherland", but General Popkov's scheme had obvious flaws and led to the same collapse of the state as democratic freedoms. The general himself spoke about the war, and the war is being waged by a variety of methods, but he suggested only one.

But what General Popkov told me stuck deep into my soul. I understood this subconsciously, but I could not explain it to myself. And he simply explained: WAR! The eternal war of the government against the people and the people against the government. And serfdom was necessary so that the people would not run away, but would work. That's why they were so afraid to cancel it, but as it was canceled, that's how it all went

upside down until it collapsed in 1917. But after all, it was impossible not to cancel.

The country reached a dead end, and the abolition of serfdom was the only way out of this dead end, but the way out leading to death. And now the country is at an impasse, and everyone already understands that the way out is to change the social system in order to get out of the impasse. And where to go? Back to another disaster? Or calmly trample in a dead end, imitating forward movement, rejoicing that under the nuclear umbrella no one will cause you much harm in this dead end. There will be neither the Crimean War, nor the Japanese War, nor the First World War, but only our internal GREAT WAR will remain, constantly throwing us to the backyard of world civilization and driving us into another dead end.

But maybe this war can be somehow stopped? If we understand its causes and origins, its genesis, speaking in scientific terms, then it will be possible to finally conclude PEACE? Episodes and whole epochs of our Russian and Soviet history revolved in my head, but it was a kaleidoscope, which was not so easy to understand right away ...

From General Popkov, I went to the deputy head of the 3rd Main Directorate of the KGB of the USSR, Colonel Klimov, who was preparing to become a general not today or tomorrow. He was an incomprehensible person. For a long time he supervised various research institutes of the military-industrial complex, worked behind the cordon, and now directed the work of ideological counterintelligence on an all-Union scale. In fact, he was my direct boss. I reported to him all the details of Father Gudko's case, and it was he who recommended to me the solution of this case with the public repentance of the priest on television.

It was easier said than done. Father Gudko had a penchant for the martyrdom of the early Christian prophets and resolutely refused to even talk about this topic. Of course, in our practice there were many ways to induce the defendants to the so-called cooperation with the investigation. In addition to the selection of articles I have already mentioned, there were many others. It was possible to deprive the defendant of the packages, to put him either a prisoner with a clear mental disorder, or a criminal with thieves' manners, well instructed in advance. But in the case of Father Gudko, Klimov did not give permission for any of these events. He welcomed me kindly. It was rumored that this complacency was just a mask, but if it was a mask, then it was very firmly glued on.

"Sit down," he told me, "and brag." What did your boss do for you?

"Conversation," I replied, smiling to match the colonel.

"If the authorities honor a subordinate with a conversation," Klimov grinned, "then they are obviously preoccupied with something. Apparently, it is preoccupied with a lack of understanding by subordinates of its main task?"

I preferred to remain silent.

— Have you heard about the Lieutenant Colonel Bondarenko case? suddenly changing the subject colonel.

"I heard," I confirmed.

Lieutenant Colonel Bondarenko worked here at the Lubyanka. He received a lieutenant colonel at age 28. The post-war state security did not know such a dizzying career. Moreover, Bondarenko did not have any "hairy hand" that would move him up the career ladder. He was, as they say, a counterintelligence officer by the grace of God. Using his secret connections and illegal informants, working in some kind of poetic inspiration, Bondarenko reached out to a whole tangle of foreign residencies working without

diplomatic cover not only in such large cities as Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, Kiev and Chelyabinsk, but also in almost all cities that did not appear on the map of the USSR, since they were closed and strictly classified. With the help of his agents, Bondarenko compiled an excellent program of disinformation for Western intelligence services and, using the infiltration of his people into the residency, was already getting close to the famous computer information in the heart of the CIA in Langley.

We in Leningrad then, of course, did not know anything about his activities. And they found out, and even then in general terms, clouded by rumors, when a message came that KGB Lieutenant Colonel Bondarenko was captured while trying to transfer secret KGB ciphers to a representative of the US Embassy. The representative of the embassy was expelled from the USSR, and Bondarenko was tried under Article 64 (treason with signs of espionage) and sentenced to death.

Currently, he was in Lefortovo, awaiting a decision on his fate on appeal in the Supreme Court and while away the time on death row. Somehow, from the very beginning, I could not believe that such an experienced employee as Bondarenko himself would contact the embassy worker in order to give him some ciphers. Naturally, the counterintelligence network that Bondarenko created almost throughout the entire territory of the USSR was destroyed. Of course, no one in Leningrad told us that this was Bondarenko's network, but by many signs we guessed this ourselves.

"The main fault of Bondarenko," said Klimov, looking over my head at the portrait of Andropov, "was that he misunderstood his main task. The Americans did not need our ciphers at all.

- What did they need? I asked cautiously, not at all understanding what Klimov was driving at. - Either Bondarenko worked for them from the very beginning and they handed him over. Either Bondarenko unexpectedly decided to go over to the enemy himself, choosing not the most ingenious way. Or...

"And what they needed," Klimov said thoughtfully, "we must find out with you, Vasily.

"But I'm on the business of the priest Gudko," I reminded him.

"Exactly," Klimov took out a folder from the desk drawer, pulled out a sheet of paper and handed it to me, "read it.

The paper was handwritten in a round, legible handwriting: "I also learned that a tall, blond foreigner often came to the traitor to the Motherland priest Gudko in a gray Zhiguli car. They locked themselves in a room with a traitor priest and talked about nothing I know. And the number of the car "MOS 48-16"

There was no signature. From the case of Father Gudko, this document was withdrawn or not registered at all,

"This is Bondarenko's car number," Klimov explained.

Why a foreigner? I was surprised.

"The source of information," laughed the colonel, "does not suggest that Soviet people can walk around in foreign clothes. Bondarenko bought things in the same dispenser, and me too.

Klimov lovingly stroked the lapel of his Italian jacket.

In addition, tall, thin, blond. Well, right, the Aryan from the action movie. Here is the old man

mistook him for a foreigner, or writes in such a way on purpose in order to completely drown Gudko. But it's not that. And the fact that Bondarenko had a connection with Gudko.

- Why is this document not in the Gudko investigative file? I asked the colonel.

"That is why," Klimov explained, "that those who are conducting the Gudko case here with us are not at all interested in this piece of paper. Yes, and they are not supposed to climb into such matters. Their task is to hold Gudko under Article 70, and in the light of the latest instructions, to force him to repent publicly. You, Berkesov, we specifically whistled out of St. Petersburg so that you would work precisely on the connection between Gudko and Bondarenko. It is possible that he received part of the anti-Soviet information from Bondarenko. And he, through his channels, could get her a whole car or two. And although the command defines this as our main task, secondary tasks can be no less interesting. Do you understand me, Berkesov?"

My tongue itched to ask who and why seized this piece of paper from the priest's file, but I bit my tongue and answered: "That's right, I understand, Comrade Colonel."

"If you understand, then act," said Klimov, nodding his head towards the door.

There was so much coldness in his nod that it did not fit in so well with his eternal complacency, so that I had no choice but to stand up and formally ask: "Permission to go, Comrade Colonel."

Klimov also silently nodded his head, looking at me with some strange look.

The KGB education system is always based on the difference in temperatures and expectations. You think that you will be rewarded and you will be shot. You think you're done, but you promoted in rank.

One could already get used to it, but I left Klimov with some kind of unconscious anxiety. No, not from the unexpected coldness that wafted from the colonel at the end of our conversation, but rather from the question: why, out of the many thousands of Moscow KGB officers, there was no one to whom Klimov could entrust this work, choosing me, in essence, an unknown ordinary Leningrad investigator ?

Chapter 2

On the morning of the next day, I arrived at the famous Lefortovo remand prison, known to the common people under the name "Matrosskaya Tishina" after the name of the street on which this detention center is located. At the entrance, the duty officer asked me to hand over my weapons.

"I never carry a gun with me," I assured him.

"And in vain," the officer sighed. "Soon you will see it."

I did not argue, but quickly filling out all the instructions and resolutions issued to me at Lubyanka, I ordered the convicted Bondarenko to be brought to the investigation chamber. Bondarenko was brought in handcuffs. He was shorn bald and dressed in a striped suicide uniform and a matching striped cap. Despite such an outfit, pallor and sunken eyes, so natural for a man living under the Damocles sword of death sentence, the former lieutenant colonel still looked very impressive. Tall, broad-shouldered, with exceptionally regular (and not memorable) facial features. The controller sat him down on a stool set into the cement floor.

— Take off the handcuffs? he asked me.

“Take it off,” I said, “and you can go.”

Freed from the handcuffs, Bondarenko took out a cigarette from somewhere under his uniform and asked me for a light.

“I don’t smoke,” I replied dryly. - Be patient. Smoke in the chamber.

He sighed and hid the cigarette somewhere.

“I am a KGB investigator, Major Vasily Viktorovich Berkesov,” I began our conversation. “I have been instructed to interrogate you on the circumstances that have been revealed in your case.

In principle, this was a violation of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Bondarenko's case was over, a trial took place and a verdict was passed. Therefore, I had to start by presenting an order to reopen the case or to open a new case, which would be possible if the tribunal returned the case for further investigation. That is, there would be no verdict. But the verdict was, and very unambiguous - an exceptional measure of punishment, in legal language.

But, as I expected, there were no protests from Bondarenko. He was calm, even too calm for a man in his position. On the contrary, I was nervous. I studied Father Gudko's case well, but I didn't even see Bondarenko's case even from a distance. When, after leaving Klimov, I asked the archives for this file in order to familiarize myself with it, they demanded a special permit, which would have taken two days to complete. I called Klimov directly from the archive. He quipped something about our eternal bureaucracy and asked an employee of the secret archive to answer the phone. He picked up the phone and told Klimov that the case had not yet been returned from the tribunal, since it was on appeal. Then he gave the phone to me. “Berkesov,” said Klimov, “why do you need Bondarenko's case? What do you need to know there? You already know everything.

I warned Bondarenko about responsibility for giving false evidence and for refusing to testify. It was absurd to threaten two years in prison to a man sentenced to death. But the law demanded so, and Bondarenko understood everything correctly.

- Am I questioning you as a witness? - he asked.

“You are being interrogated,” I confirmed, “as a witness in a criminal case opened against citizen Nikolai Dmitrievich Gudko under Article 70, part 1 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR. Want to read the article?

“I know it,” Bondarenko refused to read the article.

“Okay,” I agreed, “then let's get down to business.” How long have you known Citizen Gudko and what was your relationship like?

“I don’t know such a thing,” Bondarenko replied calmly.

- And if you remember? I tried to insist.

“And there's nothing to remember,” Bondarenko snapped, “I’m still out of my mind. I don't know that. You can put that on the record. Don't know.

- So, - I agreed, - did the gray Zhiguli car with the registration number MOS 48-1 6 belong to you?

“To me,” Bondarenko confirmed, “that is, it was a company car, but fixed

Behind me.

- Where did you keep her?

"Wherever you have to," Bondarenko shrugged. - When near the house, when at the Office, when in the garage of the Office. I didn't have mine.

— Could anyone else use your car in your absence? Say, when were you on vacation or on a business trip?

"Of course," Bondarenko agreed. "You know how it is with our cars. Once I was on a business trip for three months, so the car was officially transferred to the 3rd department. When I returned, I scratched it out from them for almost a week. I had to go to Klimov, otherwise they would not have given it back.

- Do you mean Colonel Klimov, deputy head of the 3rd Main Directorate?

"Him," Bondarenko confirmed.

— Have you ever traveled in the indicated car with the registration number MOS 48-16 to the village of Dubrovo, Moscow Region, on 6th Socialist Street, house 18? I suddenly asked. Unexpected even for himself.

Bondarenko gave me a quick, wary look.

- You do not understand the question? I asked.

"The question is understandable," Bondarenko said slowly, as if gaining time to think over the answer. Then, with some incomprehensible challenge, he answered: - I had to!

"Citizen Bondarenko," I said ingratiatingly. "I would still advise in your position not to behave unreasonably. You just told me that you do not know and never knew citizen Gudko, and now you confirm that you were at 18 Socialist Street in the village of Dubrovo. But this is the address where citizen Gudko lived before his arrest. Why are you misleading the investigation?"

"I went there on operational matters," Bondarenko answered, "and I already answered these questions during the investigation. You, apparently, did not read my case, otherwise you would not have asked such a question. And I really don't know Citizen Gudko.

"So why did you go to his house if you didn't know him?"

"I repeat," Bondarenko replied wearily, "that the answers to these questions can be found in my investigative file. If, of course, they let you read it, in which I strongly
I doubt.

I felt myself blush with anger. I know that this is my fault, but I will never learn to control myself.

I called the controller and ordered Bondarenko to be taken back to the death cell. And he himself remained sitting at the rickety government desk of the pre-trial detention center. Why did they put me in this case with Bondarenko? To make sure he didn't know Priest Gudko? Or, on the contrary, to prove that Gudko was associated with Bondarenko and reclassify him as an under-execution article 64? But after all, a decision has already been made to release him into the wild after public repentance. If Bondarenko decided to simply take Gudko out of the fire, then why did he admit in a minute that he had been in his house? It was unpleasant to feel like a fool in some strange game, where everyone is from Klimov to the one sentenced to death

Bondarenko - they know more than me. So I decided to play my game. The fact is that Father Gudko was also imprisoned in Lefortovo, although in a different building. I called the officer on duty and gave the order to bring him in for questioning.

"You are just a multi-station worker, like Pasha Angelina, Comrade Major," the prison officer on duty joked.

Pasha Angelina was a tractor driver, not a multi-machine driver, but I didn't object, and answered him in tone that such a time - you have to be Pasha Angelina.

Again, according to the law, I had no right to interrogate Father Gudko today. It was supposed to have an order for interrogation, and the order was for one Bondarenko. But no one, of course, paid attention to such trifles. Since an employee needs to interrogate someone, they will even wake him up in the middle of the night, although night interrogations are strictly prohibited by a special decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The KGB knows what to do and when!

Drive Gudko had to wait a tiringly long time. There was lunch in the corps, but in the army and in prison this is a sacred event that nothing can interrupt in peacetime.

He came in - tall, overweight, overgrown with a thick beard with gray hair, and signed me with a cross.

I winced.

"Don't be a clown, Nikolai Dmitrievich. Sit down. Let's talk further.

"What's the point of talking, Vasily Viktorovich," the priest freaked out. - I told you that I would not take such a sin on my soul, God forgive me. Shame on the whole country that I worked for the CIA. It turns out that I did not carry the word of God to the people at will, but the Jews ordered me to do this ...

- What Jews? I didn't understand.

These are from the CIA. Zionists, that is, - Father Gudko crossed himself.

"The CIA is Americans, not Jews," I clarified, starting to get angry.

- And everything is the same for me, - said the priest, - that the Americans, that the Jews. One word - infidels, save the Lord!

"Stop it, Nikolai Dmitrievich," I asked, "don't lose face. You are an educated person to understand such simple questions. Among the books confiscated from you was even the work of the White Guard Florensky on an excellent mathematical model of the philosophy of Christianity with your notes. And you are building some kind of holy fool out of yourself. And you want me to believe you. If you don't want to be on TV, that's up to you. Let's take you through the 2nd part of the 70th article. Get 10 years of camps and 5 years of links. You will immediately go to heaven as a martyr for the faith. And if you take into account the new circumstances that are opening up in your case, then how could you not thunder for 15 years even on the 64th, if not worse.

- What kind of circumstances are these? the priest asked fearfully.

- Bondarenko Sergey - did you know such a person?

"No, Vasily Viktorovich, this is the first time I hear from you," it was clear from his face that he was telling the truth.

- And who came to you in Dubrovo in gray Zhiguli?

— On the gray Zhiguli? Gudko asked. Misha has arrived. Misha Eremeev.

"Here's the news," I thought. "What kind of Misha Yeremeyev?" No Misha appeared in the case. I remembered the protocols of the search carried out in Gudko's house in Dubrovo on the 5th Socialist Street. There, under the inscription "Nothing was found or seized," there were bold "zetats" and there were signatures of attesting witnesses. Among them, it seems, was the signature of some Eremeev.

- Who is this Yeremeev? Why didn't you talk about it before?

"I haven't talked about a lot of things yet, Vasily Viktorovich," Father Gudko said, "and I won't say anything about a lot, even roast me at the stake." God will strengthen me. And your power is antichrist, Jewish ...

"Citizen Gudko," I interrupted him as gently as possible, "don't make your situation worse. I'll put these words of yours into the protocol now, and if you continue to conduct anti-Soviet propaganda under the KGB investigator, then what, I wonder, the judges will say when they determine the measure of punishment for you? If you do not think about yourself, then at least think about your wife and loved ones. Because of a relative like you, they can be deprived of their registration in six seconds and sent somewhere in Komi, or even farther away. Are you aware of this?

He was silent.

- So who is Misha Yeremeev? I asked again.

— Misha? asked Father Gudko. - My lodger. I rented a house when the old woman and I lived in the desert. The house was empty, but Misha paid well, and the man was sober, neat and conscientious.

- Is he a foreigner?

Father Gudko recoiled as if from a blowtorch.

"The Lord is with you, Vasily Viktorovich," he said, "that you are slipping all the foreigners on me. He is Russian. The same as you and me. Do you know how I lived? The policeman didn't let me through. Followed me like a villain. Then where did my money come from, then what books I have on the table, I ran and watched everything. And as soon as Misha appeared, the district policeman fell behind. Surely, if he were a foreigner, would our district police officer allow this? He would have both me and him ... you understand. And here everything is quiet. I went to the desert, and Misha is at home enjoyed...

It was in the desert near Gudko that at least two cubic meters of banned books were confiscated during a search. We even made a presentation to the patriarch on this occasion.

- Do you remember the number of this Eremeev's car? I asked.

"What are you talking about," Father Glushko was amazed, "I never paid any attention to him. I don't remember, of course.

- Well, at least there was a Moscow number? I was starting to lose my patience.

"It looks like Moscow," the priest recalled, wrinkling his forehead. - Misha himself was a Muscovite. From Moscow, therefore, came. Yes, I remember that he was not driving himself, but some friend gave him a ride. Sometimes he waited in the car, and sometimes he left immediately. But he never entered the house. I even decided that it was just a driver.

- Can you describe it?

"Yeah, I didn't really see him. Light-haired, I remember," Father Gudko sighed heavily. "Here, the demon has beguiled, our sins are grave," and crossed himself again.

- Did you talk about anything with Yeremeev? Did he tell you anything about himself? - I was angry that I did not even have a photograph of Bondarenko to give it to the priest for identification.

"They talked, of course," Gudko admitted, "mostly about God, about the meaning of Being, about divine miracles..."

Is he a priest too? I was surprised.

"No," Father Gudko shook his head, "he was not ordained to the priesthood, but he is a very educated person in theology, in Divine philosophy, in various theological sciences.

"Interesting," a thought flashed through my mind, "where can we study theology here? Even in the theological academy, all sciences are studied according to the manuals of the ideological department of the Central Committee."

- He probably brought you different books, because of which you are here. Right?

Father Gudko was silent.

- And he probably had anti-Soviet conversations with you, inciting various slanderous fabrications against our social system?

Gudko was silent, tugging at his beard.

"So, are you going to keep quiet?" I asked, Or is there nothing more to say?

"That's how it turns out," the priest broke the silence. - It seems that Vasily Viktorovich and I are both Russians, we were born in the same country, we speak the same language. But in fact, it turns out that you and I, as it were, are inhabitants of different planets. And you don't understand me, and I don't understand you. What I consider good is called evil on your planet. I speak the word of God, and you call it slanderous fabrications against the social system, I read the Bible as a holy book, but for you it is anti-Soviet literature only because it was published in Munich. So what can I tell you about my conversations with Misha? They seem interesting and useful to me, but would you listen - would you decide that they are anti-Soviet, or whatever you call them?

"There are laws," I said solemnly, "which you and I did not invent, but which we are obliged to comply with. Any state is obliged to protect itself. As for misunderstanding, I assure you that criminals under investigation always have a poor understanding of the investigator. And you, Nikolai Dmitrievich, do not want to understand that you have committed a state crime by distributing literature that was thrown into the territory of the USSR with a sabotage purpose by the secret services of the West. By the way, didn't this Yeremeyev call for the overthrow of the socio-political system existing in the country?

He was silent.

I spoke the last phrase automatically, thinking about whether to arrange a confrontation between Bondarenko and Gudko. But I decided not to do this, because I already went beyond the scope of the instructions that Klimov gave me. After asking Gudko a few more questions about Ereemeev's appearance and making sure that he did not look like Bondarenko at all (although his "fair-haired driver" did not get out of my head), I asked what this Ereemeev was doing. Did he say anything about it?

- I understood this, - Father Gudko answered, - that he taught philosophy somewhere. At some institute. I didn't go into detail.

In our institutes only Marxist-Leninist philosophy is taught. Surely this is some kind of another psycho, of which there are already quite a few bred in the departments of philosophy and history of the CPSU. Having read the primary sources, these people began, like children, to seek the truth, confuse students and, what is most sad, look for forbidden books, hoping to find answers to their questions that tormented them. And ended up in jail.

Before sending the priest back to the cell, I took out a couple of typewritten sheets from the folder and handed them to Father Gudko.

- This is the text of the statement that you must make on television. Think, read. If you don't particularly like something, we will discuss it and remove it. Maybe we'll add something. You have no reason to refuse. You will have a hard time in the zone. Your brother is not very favored there. Think. Your work is coming to an end. Judgment is coming soon. So think fast.

I reported to Klimov about the results of my trip to Lefortovo. He looked through the protocols of interrogations of Bondarenko and Gudko, did not say anything and put them in the safe.

- And what kind of Ereemeev is this? I asked.

- Ereemeev? Klimov asked. — Yes, there is one. A very interesting type.

"Why isn't he on the case?" I continued to wonder.

Klimov went to the window.

"Weather is a luxury," said the Colonel dreamily. - Today is Saturday? I'll go to the dacha, go fishing.

He turned to me.

- All right, Vasya. Thank you for your assistance. I won't forget. You can return home. Don't report anything to anyone. We will notify your superiors. Go write out a ticket while the office is open. And then everyone will scatter before the weekend.

I realized that I was not supposed to know anything else, and decided to refrain from further questions.

On the way to the station, where I was kindly dropped off in a state-owned car, I found myself constantly thinking about this strange house in Dubrovo, where the fates of supposedly unfamiliar people were so dramatically intertwined: Lieutenant Colonel Bondarenko and priest Gudko. And, of course, about this "interesting type", as Colonel Klimov put it, that is, about Misha Yeremeev. I have been working for the KGB long enough to intuitively feel that this whole story is very dark, and I am not involved in it at all by accident.

Not a single counterintelligence service lives according to Aristotelian logic. Everything logical should be swept aside from the very beginning. There is only one rule of the famous Jewish anecdote with a pre-revolutionary beard: "You say you are going to Odessa. But you really are going to Odessa. So why are you lying to me?"

I went into the cool building of the Leningradsky railway station and went out onto the platform. My "sitting" train departed at 15:10. It was a quarter to three. The train was already served, but I did not want to climb into the closeness of the sealed carriage of the fast train, and I began to walk along the platform, looking at the green numbers of the electronic clock. Walked from the platform

staircase leading to the station square to the right of the station building itself. Among the stalls and people sitting on bundles and suitcases, I somehow mechanically noted the green eye of a standing taxi. Not quite realizing what I was doing, I walked up to the taxi and, opening the door, asked the driver, who was dozing at the wheel, "Will you take me to Dubrovo?"

- Is it according to Yaroslavsky? asked the driver, although his face showed that he knows everything.

I did not answer, because I know the Moscow region rather poorly. The driver thought a little and said: "Fifty dollars." That is fifty rubles. At the time it was very expensive. But I still had travel money, and I did not bargain.

The driver drove the car as if he drove to Dubrovo every day. The gray ribbon of the Yaroslavl Highway twisted from hill to hill, and I, looking out the car window at the unique nature of the Moscow region, tried to put my thoughts in order and understand what I was actually doing. The authorities clearly ordered me to return to St. Petersburg. Instead, I'm going to Dubrovo, where I will be absolutely clearly spotted, because Gudko's father's house, for sure, is under the supervision, if not of Klimov's people, then of the local regional department.

And why am I actually going there, and what do I hope to find there? I will try to explain everything by an unexpected "flash of official zeal", as those who are caught in bed with stool girls love to joke with us. Officially, this is called "establishing contact with agents." Here's what I'll say: it seemed strange to me the protocol of the search conducted in the house of Gudko's father - "Nothing was found or seized." That doesn't happen. I decided to conduct a secret (before the official re-search) inspection of the house, in the hope of discovering a cache of anti-Soviet literature. I already believed that this was why I was going to Dubrovo. As I already mentioned, here in the KGB you never know what you will get for your initiative: an order or dismissal with a wolf ticket, or even a term. Okay, I reassured myself, when I write an explanation, I'll come up with something better.

Meanwhile, the driver turned off the highway onto some country road, jumped out onto another road, where I managed to notice the sign "Zagorsk - 15 km", and said:

— Arrived in Dubrovo. Where are you?

- I'm on the 5th Socialist, - I said.

"I don't know," the driver said in a disgruntled voice. "I don't know which street is which. I'll take you to the bus stop, and look for yourself there.

For fifty kopecks, he could have served me better, but I suddenly became so worried that I did not protest. Apparently, I already, like a hound, smelled the beast and nothing else existed for me.

The streets were deserted. Houses in the green crowns of trees were hidden behind high fences. Only near one fence two peasants were digging into the engine of the Moskvich. I asked them how to get to the 5th Socialist. It turned out to be very close. It turns out that I was walking along 3rd Profsoyuznaya Street, and the Socialist Streets were crossing it.

The house on the 5th Socialist Street turned out to be an old, but quite solid wooden building, surrounded by a fence about two meters high, from behind which branches of apple trees stuck out. On the gate was the inscription "Caution! Angry dog!" and a dog's mouth with huge teeth was drawn. "Very strange for a priest," I thought. There was nothing like a call. I walked along the fence, thinking about how I could get inside and drive away the "evil dog". In one place of the fence there was a rather solid gap. I looked into it and the first thing I saw was a gray Zhiguli with the license plate MOS 48-16.

I was thrown into a sweat. I remembered the words of the officer on duty at the Lefortovo prison:
"You will regret not carrying a pistol with you."

I really regretted it.

What to do? My first thought was to go to the local police station, show them my ID and demand that they search the dacha, detaining everyone who was found there. But I immediately dismissed that thought. Knowing the attitude of the police towards the KGB, I quite clearly imagined what would happen if I turned to them. They will fiddle with my Leningrad identity card for a long time, trying to figure out how, in fact, I ended up in Dubrovo. Then they will call their superiors, who, which is not at all excluded, will order to detain me and fully clarify my identity. I again remembered that I was acting completely arbitrarily, and it was in my interests not to show myself in any way yet.

Frantically thinking what I should do, I walked around the house once more around the fence and in a dream found myself in front of a gate with the inscription "Beware! Angry dog." I began to look with my eyes for some kind of stick to drive away the "evil dog" if it rushed at me, and I had already decided to jump over the fence, when suddenly the gate opened and, to my greatest amazement (to put it mildly!), I saw an ensign Petrenko - the driver and guarantor of Colonel Klimov.

- Vasily Viktorovich! - the ensign said affably. - Why are you rubbing in front of the gate? Come on in, you've been waiting. Where did you think you got lost?

Thinking nothing, I followed Petrenko through the garden, the main advantage of which were flower beds with peonies. I automatically remembered that in the case of Father Gudko there was a certificate from the district police officer that the priest's wife, Evdokia Afanasievna, "speculated" in the market with flowers, living after her husband's landing on "unearned income." I don't know why I remembered this while walking through the garden, since I was so amazed that, it would seem, I should not have seen anything, except for the back of the ensign walking in front.

We entered the veranda. Sitting at the table, lounging in easy chairs, drinking bottled wine, Colonel Klimov and some peasant about my age with a simple, open face, reminiscent of either tractor drivers or tankers from our pre-war films. In general, a typical positive face.

"Well, Vasily, you've done well," said Klimov, getting up and shaking my hand, "he didn't let me down, he came. I was sure that you would come, but here he is, - Klimov pointed to the smiling "tractor driver", - he doubted. He says he can't find a way. And I told him: "Vasya Berkesov will find his way anywhere!" Do you want beer?

Beer was "Moscow". I remembered that they had been trading on Lubyanka all morning today.

"Comrade Colonel..." I began, not really knowing what I wanted to say.

But then the "tractor driver" got up and, giving me his hand, introduced himself:

— Michael. Maybe just Misha.

- Ereameev? I asked.

The Colonel and Misha burst out laughing. I understood the meaning of this laughter a little later, but in order to at least say something, I answered:

Berkesov Vasily. You can simply - Vasya.

This was our first meeting.

That's how I first met a ruthless and daring professional who played such a big role not only in my fate, but also in the fate of our country. From my quiet Leningrad office on the second floor of the Bolshoy Dom, where I spent long hours "splitting" anti-Sovietists and tediously typing idiotic transcripts of their interrogations with one finger, I was unexpectedly catapulted into the thick of the sharpest political intrigue, the very existence of which I could hardly have imagined. I entered the five-hundred-year-old war, although I still could not really tell which side I was fighting on.

American publisher's note

It is interesting to note that General Berkesov, although he wrote this book without any hope of ever publishing it, nevertheless could not get rid of the self-censorship so characteristic of everyone who lived under the Soviet system, and especially people of his profession. Things were not exactly as he describes in these two chapters. One can see a clear desire to cover up some people from the then leadership of the KGB, who until the end remained the direct and immediate superiors of Berkesov.

In particular, Colonel Klimov could not have been in Dubrovo at that moment, because (and I know this for sure) he urgently flew to Bern for a meeting, which I was also present.

I keep track of time in the case of the priest Nikolai Gudko, which is well known.

It is also well known that the priest made a televised repentance, and the Supreme Court of the USSR replaced Lieutenant Colonel Sergei Bondarenko with 15 years in prison. He was released, it seems, after the August coup. It was very difficult to get the death sentence overturned, and since I felt morally responsible for the fate of this man, I helped him move to the West. Bondarenko currently lives in Munich. He offered a number of European publishers his book under the intriguing title "The KGB Destroyed the Soviet Union." I have not read this book, although, judging by the magazine summary, it will be very emotional, but interesting.

D. M. McIntyre

Part 3

VIII

Trains with missile systems for Saddam Hussein, meanwhile, arrived in St. Petersburg, where they were intercepted by Berkesov's people and driven into a dead end. What is Berkesov to me about

reported early in the morning. If not morning, then some kind of surprise, although there was no surprise in these echelons. They have been waiting for a long time. But for some reason, I wasn't happy at all. Something, perhaps a long-standing experience, told me that here, too, everything would not be as we had planned.

And I was not mistaken.

When we drove up to the freight station, where these damned trains were stopped, Berkesov was informed right as he got out of the car that the guards were not letting anyone near the platforms. There are many guards, all of them have Kalashnikovs, pistols and even army grenades.

"We'll figure it out," Berkesov reacted dryly and said a few words to Major Shepelev. He dived back into the car and began to press some red buttons on the radiotelephone.

On three parallel tracks there were rows of platforms with containers for reloading onto sea vessels. They were long, like traffic jams in Times Square at rush hour. The impression was created that all of its missile potential was being taken out of the country.

A fine fellow in an army short fur coat without insignia, girded with a pistol, jumped up to Berkesov. Behind him loomed two with machine guns. On the platforms (it seemed to me that almost every one) were the same guys in paramilitary uniforms with machine guns.

Saddam Hussein, apparently, does not spare money, I thought, he does everything on a grand scale, almost with pomp. It would not be enough to hang banners on the platforms with inscriptions like: "Greetings to the heroic Iraqi people from the valiant rocket men of the former USSR!"

I allowed myself to mentally scoff, unaware of what surprises awaited me.

"Head of the cargo security group, Belov," introduced himself in a semi-military uniform with a pistol. The air wafted with a bouquet of cheap port and industrial alcohol.

Berkesov identified himself and presented the decision to detain and check the cargo.

- What to check? Belov was surprised. - I have everything in the invoices. Everything is like supposed to.

We went to a small house, where there were some offices of the marshalling yard.

- What are you carrying? Berkesov asked, examining the bills of lading presented to him.

"Scrap metal," Belov sniffled. - It's all written.

— In containers?

"None of my concern," snapped the head of security. - In what they loaded - in that I'm taking it.

"Good," Berkesov agreed. "Now open a few containers for me. Let's see what you have there for scrap metal.

"I'll shoot with my own hand," Belov suddenly yelled, pulling a pistol from his holster. "Just get to the platforms!"

Leaving the invoices with Berkesov, he rushed out of the room with a pistol in his hand. But then he flew back without a pistol, accompanied by some terrible people in helmets, bulletproof vests and with machine guns, very similar to Israeli Uzis.

"Sit down," Berkesov said calmly to Belov. — Why did you jump up?

And raising his head to those who entered, he ordered:

- Disarm everyone. Check documents.

Each one is personal. Then we decide what to do with them.

Berkesov has always been a pedant and lawyer. If he lived in Europe, he would have no price as the chief of police.

Do you have a gun permit? he asked Belov.

"You should have caught me in Afghanistan," Belov sniffed angrily. - I would like your permission showed...

"So there is no permission," Berkesov summed up. - It's clear. Will you be present when the containers are opened?

— Colonel! Belov suddenly yelled again. Are you tired of living? Look at this paper. This is an export permit without any inspection. Do you see whose signature this is?

Under the document with the seal was the sweeping signature of Ruslan Khasbulatov.

"Are you going to show me one paper at a time?" the Colonel asked calmly. - Let's do it all at once.

Belov was silent.

— Search! Berkesov ordered.

- Me?! Belov shouted again. - Oh, you bitch! Creature!

A heavy mat hung in the air in the alcohol exhaust.

Berkesov's commandos silently and quickly searched the chief of security.

From somewhere, another pistol fell out from under a sheepskin coat, and from a side pocket a bundle of papers mixed with dollars in hundred bills.

- Padlo! Belov growled. - Pidar! You will still remember me!

"If you don't calm down," Berkesov promised, "I'll order you to put on handcuffs.

He looked through the papers.

Why didn't you show me this? Colonel Belova asked. "Is there a taller signature here than on that one?"

"Let's see what you will sing later," Belov choked with anger. "When the sender finds out how you've been playing around here!"

"I have such papers," explained Berkesov, "two safes are full. You will help us to establish who fabricates them.

He turned to his people.

- Send him to Kalyaev. Issue a detention and personal search protocol. And establish an identity at the same time. It seems to me that he is the same Belov ...

We got on the road. The commandos had already driven the guards to the stone fence and were walking around

between platforms. One of them with captain's epaulettes approached Berkesov.

"Open a couple of containers on the nearest platforms," the Colonel ordered.

At that moment, I heard the sound of car engines. I looked at the road. A luxurious Mercedes and a Volkswagen minibus stopped near our cars and special forces buses. Uniformed policemen poured out of the Volkswagen, and two men got out of the Mercedes and quickly walked straight across the railroad tracks towards us.

I recognized them as soon as they got out of the car. Apparently, a loud scandal was brewing, since one of those who arrived was personally the mayor of the city Alexander Topchak, and the second was his deputy from the former aviation generals.

Indignation was openly read on the stern general's face, but the old school made him restrain himself, that is, keep quiet.

But the emotional law professor didn't feel the need to hide his emotions because he saw no reason to.

- Vasily Viktorovich! he shouted, panting from his quick walk. - What do you allow yourself?

And without listening to the answer he continued:

- On what basis, I ask you, do you delay the licensed cargo and disrupt the schedule for its delivery? Let me ask you, who will pay for the demurrage of ocean-going vessels? Do you know that you are disrupting the entire welfare program for the poor, which...

But then the mayor noticed me and stopped short.

Anxiety and surprise flickered in his eyes, and his face automatically broke into a radiant smile.

— Mike! he exclaimed. - What are your fates here?

"I want to subscribe to a couple of containers," I replied. - To send home a collection of diamonds collected during your stay in your country. Yes, I can't find the right size. They are all kind of small.

"You are all joking," Topchak smiled even wider and, taking my arm, led me away from Berkesov. "You promised me to come to the Anichkov Palace today. There will be a reception on the occasion of the creation of a new Russian-American commercial bank. You promised me. Especially since there are a few cases, Mike, that only you can resolve to our mutual benefit. Will you come?

- I'll think about it. Let's see how things end here, - I made a worried face.

"Did you incite Berkesov to hold up the echelons?" the mayor asked.

- No. It was his minister who did it, but I didn't mind. We are not entirely sure that the cargo is licensed, as you assure me - I looked with interest at one of the luminaries of Russian democracy. Is he also moonlighting on Saddam's rockets?

"I don't understand, Mike," Topchak lowered his voice. - What's happened? This is our common cause. You also...

"We'll figure it out," I said in the voice of Colonel Berkesov, while Berkesov himself and his people began to open the containers.

"Comrade Berkesov," the mayor persisted. — You are personally responsible for the safety of everything in the containers. I promise you for sure that you will answer for this arbitrariness!

"I'm following orders," the colonel snapped from the platform to the mayor below. - Call Moscow. They will tell you what happened.

"I'll call," the mayor promised. - But not to your department, but to the presidential administration!

Berkesov did not answer, because the container had already been opened and the colonel stuck his head in there.

I also climbed onto the platform.

- Well, what is there?

"Titan," said Berkesov, brushing dust and dirt from the sleeves of his overcoat. — Titan. Also interesting. A strategic raw material after all.

Other open containers also contained rare earth metals, unique alloys, and the like. But no hint of missiles or any related equipment.

"Very interesting," I said. - Is it not those echelons?

"Those," Berkesov checked the bills once more. - Everything is correct. Loaded in Arzamas. The recipient is the Leningrad Commercial Port.

- Where are the missiles? I asked.

"Ask for something easier," Berkesov froze and began to get angry. - The devil knows what the head of the Department should personally do! Some kind of idiocy!

- Search all containers! - the colonel ordered, jumping off the platform and reporting to me personally. Draw up the necessary inspection protocol.

I was already convinced that there was no smell of any missiles, at least in these echelons. I understood the hysteria that the mayor threw at Berkesov at the marshalling yard.

- What does it mean? I asked Berkesov as we drove back to the city.

"That means we've been beaten with a thimble," replied the Colonel. So that we don't think we're too smart.

"We've already been beaten twice at the thimble: first with Coyote, now with rockets," I laughed, although I didn't find it funny at all.

"What, are you sorry," Berkesov announced unexpectedly, "if Huosein gets these ranets?" You'll be better off.

— Is that how? I wondered, realizing where he was driving. "We might be better off. Only I'm afraid that he will aim these missiles not at us, but at you. And the eternal story will happen: you will first arm your potential enemy, and then you will start to fight with him and sing: "We will not stand up for the price." It seems so?

"I'm interested in something else," Berkesov said. We'll take care of the missiles. Did you hear how the mayor went bankrupt at the station? Thanks again for seeing you, otherwise I would probably start fighting. It means that he was waiting for these echelons and knew that he was in them. He would have become so nervous because of the missiles, even if he had been in the share! I know him well. He would have flown somewhere a day before the trains arrived: to London or Lausanne to monitor real estate. So, we were told that Hussein was in the echelons of the rocket, and Topchak knew that there was foreign exchange raw materials. Who started such misinformation and why?

"Such amusing things are happening in your country today," I agreed, "that nothing is surprising anymore. This disinformation can also go specifically along the line of your department, say, for another scandal, in order to compromise you, I mean you personally, and Klimov, and God knows who else. As you know, five or six powerful security services are currently operating in the country, which at one time broke away from the all-Union KGB. Each has its own goals and its own methods, but all work at a professional or semi-professional level. Perhaps I was removed from Moscow only so that these echelons with metal would reach St. Petersburg. Everything can be.

- And how will your superiors react to such a puncture? Berkesov asked without a hint of malice.

"I don't care," I said frankly. - It's a shame, of course, to end your career with such two blunders as Coyote and rockets, but if you approach it by and large, this is all a trifle, which, in principle, people of such rank as you and me should not even deal with. It's none of our business. Yes, besides, I'm already retiring anyway. My replacement has already arrived in Paris and is waiting for me there. And I, I confess to you, Berkesov, am damn tired.

"You can be envied," Berkesov chuckled. "My situation is much worse. Before retirement, I still have to serve like a copper pot, but they can kick me out at any moment.

"No," I replied. - As far as I know, not only is no one going to expel you, but they will even try to get you promoted to general.

Berkesov sighed. He really wanted to be, if expelled, then a general.

"At present," he said, looking into the thick glass separating us from the driver, "the president has received a paper from a group of deputies from former political prisoners about the need to immediately remove me from office and almost put me on trial for crimes. This is exactly what they formulate - "for the crimes committed during the years of the so-called" stagnation ". You know very well what we did in those years and in the name of what. get attached to anything. Coyote didn't catch, but missed, missed the missiles, and instead of them delayed the export cargo and introduced the city administration into the costs of the penalty. Every day after your arrival in the city, I expect some kind of trouble, big trouble.

He sighed again, looking like an offended tapir in profile.

I felt sorry for him. Is it worth it to be so upset because of such trifles.

"Don't worry," I consoled Berkesov. - If this paper is filed in the name of the President, then it will never reach him. His administration is full of our people. In addition, in the near future we will do something to get you talking.

"They talk about me too much already," the colonel exhaled angrily, "both on the radio, I'm on television, and in the newspapers they write such things that it's scary to read ... As if I were some kind of Himmler.

"That's not what I'm talking about," Berkesov's lamentations brought me back to a good mood. - Will be needed

you to carry out one or two high-profile operations, hitting many government officials at once. Yes, so that they all shut up.

"In general, they will shoot," the colonel waved him off.

"Well, well," I disagreed. "They don't shoot much at security colonels these days, especially if he's in a position like you. Well, and if they kick me out, then I don't see any tragedy either. Here is your predecessor, General Burkov, already the president of a joint Russian-American bank. You will be his vice president. How many banks and various firms have already been organized by your former colleagues with the money of their native party. I speak without any reproach, but rather with admiration. Your office may have lost some illusory power over souls, but it has acquired real power. Because there is no more real power than financial power.

"The Jewish-American point of view," Berkesov disagreed gloomily with me, apparently continuing to think about something of his own. "Power over souls is much more pleasant.

"But it's an illusion of power," I continued to insist on the Jewish-American point of view. "Because power over souls is the prerogative of the Creator...

"I know, I know," Berkesov suddenly laughed. - At one time, you so powdered the brains of Father Gudko that he still cannot get out of a coma. It seems to me that it was because of you that he was drawn to the path of outright anti-Semitism.

"But I'm not a Jew," I laughed in turn, remembering my priest friend.

"On the other hand, you constantly quote Jews and don't even notice it," the colonel darkened again. "Our propagandists of the old days were somewhat right that all Americans are minions of the Zionists.

"Your trouble lies in the fact that you have always been and, apparently, will remain slaves of the terminology invented by you," I objected. "It is a characteristic feature of primitive peoples.

- If we already remembered Father Gudko, - Berkesov sighed, - then, I remember, he answered you to a similar passage: "The primitivism of peoples is determined by their proximity to God."

By this very thing I was given to understand that all our conversations with Father Gudko were recorded on a tape recorder, although Klimov swore to me that nothing like this had ever happened.

By the way, where are we going? I asked.

- I'm going to my place. We need to report to the authorities about the transformation of rockets into rare earth metals. And I would like you to be present.

- Maybe I should call Klimov myself? I offered out of compassion.

Berkesov did not answer, but his expression showed that he appreciated my proposal.

We arrived at a branch of the Security Department on Okhta, near an old cemetery overgrown with trees. The complex of buildings behind a blank stone fence was more modern than the Big House with a pre-revolutionary prison sticking out at the end of Liteiny. And the communication systems here were more modern.

Before Berkesov had time to sit in a chair in his office and order Shepelev to take care of the coffee, it was reported over the intercom that the head of the cargo security group, Belov,

detained during the inspection of the trains, in fact turned out to be Viktor Kobanenko, who is also on the All-Union wanted list. He really was an ensign in Afghanistan. In 1983, while on vacation, he killed two people in his hometown for domestic reasons, or rather, drunk, disappeared from the investigating authorities and disappeared. Naturally, he did not appear in the unit and surfaced only now under such operetta circumstances. From his documents it is clear that he is Viktor Ivanovich Belov, deputy head of the security guard for cargo escort of the transport department of the organization p / box 34078 in Arzamas-32.

In other words, the false Belov worked in the very organization that agreed with Saddam Hussein to transfer missiles to him for cash. It only remained to find out why, having loaded the rockets, Belov-Kobanenko brought scrap metal to St. Petersburg? Did he sell rockets to someone along the way? if so, who cares? It is interesting, if only because, to find out who else has that kind of money?

"And why Kobanenko and not Kabanenka," I asked, examining the record of the preliminary interrogation.

Because we are all literate. Apparently, this comes from the certificate of the former All-Union wanted list, Berkesov suggested. But these are details. Now we will talk with him, and we will call Moscow later.

"Comrade Colonel," the selector came to life. The mayor is looking for you.

Berkesov sighed.

"Switch it to me," and picked up the red telephone. Berkesov is listening.

The mayor must have launched into a very long tirade as Berkesov listened blushing, rolling his eyes and sighing. Then, breaking into a pause, he said:

- Call anyone. As soon as we find out the details we need, we will release the cargo. On what basis was Belov detained? Based on my order. He is on the All-Union wanted list for two murders. Did you not know this? I hope so. It is very advantageous to know as little as possible or nothing at all... No, Alexander Anatolyevich, I am not being sarcastic. What are you saying? Again the arbitrariness of the KGB? Assemble the "Memorial" rally. I'm not interested. I no longer work for the KGB... Yes, here.

Berkesov handed me the phone.

"Mike," Topchak said. - You will enlighten Berkesov that every hour of idle cars costs the city half a million rubles.

"It's okay," I reassured him. - I will cry.

"You both really like to joke, I'll see," the mayor got angry. - It's good for you to joke, not answering for anything. And I will have to pay this money from the city budget.

"Almost out of my own pocket," I sympathized.

Topchak pretended not to hear my remark.

"Mike," he said in a softer voice. - You promised me to come to the presentation at the Anichkov Palace. Remember?

"I might have forgotten," I admitted. "But you mention the atom so often that I will try to come. Unless, of course, Colonel Berkesov will let me go.

Topchak laughed, but not very confidently, and saying "See you later" hung up the phone.

"Actually, it's not at all in his spirit to shine like that," Berkesov said without addressing anyone and pressed the selector button: "Bring this Belov."

Apparently, during these couple of hours, as we parted so noisily at the marshalling yard, Berkesov's subordinates knocked almost all the arrogance from Belov. And besides, he still sobered up.

His sheepskin coat had been left somewhere, and when they brought him in, he was wearing an army tunic with a turn-down collar, breeches tucked into cowhide boots, and an officer-style leatherette belt. His face was pale, his eyes flitted from me to Berkesov.

"Sit down, Viktor Ivanovich," said the colonel. "We already met at the station, but in case you forgot, I'll introduce myself again. Vasily Viktorovich Berkesov, head of the Security Department of St. Petersburg. I'll be frank with you because I don't have much time. Those murders that you have committed on the territory of now sovereign Ukraine, citizen Kobanenko, do not worry me very much. And I'm sure you are very worried. So, if we now reach an understanding, you will return to your echelons as head of security with my apologies for the detention. Although, you will agree, you behaved extremely rudely. Otherwise, I will hand you over to the Criminal Investigation Department, who, I am convinced, will deliver you in handcuffs to Kyiv, where you are eagerly awaited, poppy, it seems to me, for about ten years already.

"Comrade chief," Belov-Kobanenko replied calmly. "You have said it all very nicely. Just before I answer your questions, please call Moscow by phone. Let me write it to you. Call me, tell me, so they say and so: I arrested Belov from Arzamas and all that. And then we'll talk.

Belov wrote the phone number in a flourish and handed it to Berkesov. He glanced at the numbers and pressed the call button. The attendant entered.

"Take the detainee away," the colonel ordered. - Only close. He will still be needed.

- I hope he did not write you the phone number of General Klimov? I asked when Belov was taken away.

"No," Berkesov said slowly. - Unfortunately no. If it was Klimov's phone, much would be clear. And this is the phone number of his direct boss, Deputy Security Minister Anokhin.

— Anokhin? I asked. - Didn't he get fired? I had information that he parted ways with the KGB immediately after the August coup.

"They wanted to turn him back under Bakatin," Berkesov agreed. "But something got in the way. He was taken to active reserve. We have such a procedure, and then they were taken out of the reserve and put ...

"Upgrading," I suggested. "Your KGB generals go through the same procedures as battleships in our fleet. It seems that it is already completely outdated and it is necessary to scrap it, but, you see, it has undergone modernization and has become even stronger than it was.

Berkesov winced. He did not like any analogies at all, and even more so between KGB generals and battleships. He, of course, considered the generals to be stronger.

"All right," I said. - Connect me with Klimov.

Klimov listened to me calmly.

"Understood," he summed up my brief message. - Anokhin is now our deputy minister for scientific and technical support. And with might and main engaged in the conclusion of contracts. Your way of doing business. All this is very curious. Let Berkesov properly turn this Belov inside out. He will say, they say, he called by this phone, and they answered that they did not know anything. However, that's how they would have answered. And if he succeeds, he will also take written testimony from him. Maybe he still has some phone numbers or names lost in his head. However, give me Berkesov, I'll tell him everything myself, otherwise you'll confuse something. You will also blurt out to this Belov your famous: "You can not give any evidence." Our people are not yet accustomed to such treatment. And the general laughed his low, characteristic laugh.

Berkesov picked up the phone and began his monotonous: "Yes, Comrade General, of course, Comrade General, we'll find out everything, Comrade General."

He himself was already five minutes to a general, but in his soul he remained the captain he was when we first met. Such is the fate of all who make quick careers in organizations modeled after the military monastic orders.

In conversation with a superior, always be modest, but not obsequious. Look not at the face of your superior, but at the tips of your sandals.

Berkesov hung up the receiver with an air of some relief. It is always useful to pour out your soul to the boss, especially after a failed operation. It makes the soul very easy. By the way, I remembered that all this would have to be told to Bill Trokman, who, of course, would also rejoice.

And I still have to lighten my soul.

Berkesov ordered to bring Belov-Kobanenko back;

- In vain you are trying to confuse the investigation, citizen Kobanenko, - the colonel began. - No one knows you on this phone, of course. Moreover, this is the phone of some private company that provides those who wish with sexual services at home. You can verify this for yourself by calling. Moscow code 095.

Belov-Kobanenko was silent, biting his lips. His face was flushed with red spots of the most bizarre shapes and sizes.

"Beasts," the detainee suddenly said and asked Berkesov for a cigarette.

"I don't smoke," the Colonel replied dryly. And I don't advise you.

He made me a sign with his eyes that I should not take it into my head to treat Kobanenko with cigarettes.

"You don't have much time," Berkesov continued. "Smoke in the cell... or outside. But first, in any case, you have to answer a number of questions.

"The fact that I have wet clothes hanging on me is one thing," said Kobanenko. "But I don't understand what you want to know about the cargo. Here everything is in full openwork. Everything is legal. And my documents are not bullshit, but the real ones, although they were issued under a different surname. But now it's my last name. I'm Belov now, Viktor Ivanovich.

Why were they waving guns at the station then? the colonel asked. "If everything is legal, then why go on a rampage like that?"

"He was very drunk," Kobanenko admitted. "I don't understand who you are. I thought it was a gang. The cargo there is worth billions of rubles. If I understood correctly that you are Chekists, and not

all sorts of black-assed racketeers, I wouldn't even say a word. I would show everything. I would have opened everything myself and sealed it in front of you. I'm not accompanying the first echelons. I got into such skirmishes, which is scary to remember. About thirty people lost in two years. We had to go straight through machine-gun fire, as during the war.

— Where is it? Berkesov asked with mock surprise.

- Where? Kobanenko asked. - In the south, for example. As long as you slip through the territory of Chechnya, you will sip, as they say, for the rest of your life.

Did you also take out scrap metal? - Berkesov stretched in his chair, with all his appearance demonstrating sympathy for the interrogated.

"They brought everything," Kobanenko hissed evasively.

"Well, all right," Berkesov did not elaborate. — And how did you get this job? Tell me. You knew that you were on the All-Union wanted list. Where did you get fake documents? Tell me!

The story of Belov-Kobanenko turned out to be interesting, although not very original. Arriving in his native city in Ukraine on vacation from Afghanistan, where he served as a foreman of an escort company in one of the Kabul prisons, Viktor Ivanovich, probably forgetting that he was already at home, stabbed to death some two girls ("whores" right on the dance floor, as he put it), who dared to refuse him something. He was taken right at the scene of the crime, because he clearly did not understand that he had done something reprehensible. "Just think, he knocked two whores!" - he explained to the investigator of the local prosecutor's office, who, apparently, was imbued with the significance of Kobanenko's highly civic act, as he let him go home on a written undertaking not to leave. Someone at home probably explained to Kobanenko how much this double murder could cost him, since he still had the sense to escape from the city that very night. He did it on time, because in the morning a police squad came for him. The city prosecutor did not appreciate the breadth of nature of one of his subordinates and ordered Kobanenko to be taken into custody immediately. Moreover, both "whores", as it turned out, turned out to be underage schoolgirls: one from the 9th grade, and the other from the 8th. The military prosecutor's office was also looking for Viktor Ivanovich, since a paper came from the unit stating that ensign Kobanenko, going on vacation, took with him five pistols of the Makarov system. Viktor Ivanovich categorically denied this. "It was someone who worked for me already," he said.

Berkesov did not delve into this topic. Now, when strategic missiles are being stolen from army warehouses, finding out the fate of five pistols that disappeared several years ago would be a waste of time.

Viktor Ivanovich fled to Central Asia. Contacted criminals. Central Asian criminals are a special people. At all times, from the khans to the present day, they have always acted under the strict patronage of the powers that be. Viktor Ivanovich felt uncomfortable. He was not a criminal. He was an ordinary killer, nurtured by army lawlessness. The difference here is very big. The criminals understood this too. At first they wanted Viktor Ivanovich, having sent him, of course, new documents, to send him to a zone for re-education for a year or two, but then fate had mercy on the runaway ensign, and the big godfather took him as a bodyguard. The godfather was an Uzbek and knew better than anyone how unreliable it was to hand over responsibility for one's life to one's fellow tribesmen. Kill for watermelon. He had four bodyguards. All Russians. The godfather lived on a grand scale: a three-story house, a huge garden, every outlandish bird swam in the pond and sturgeons were found. But there were no peacocks. And this meant that he was a big man, but not very. Peacock speaks not only about

degree of prosperity, but also about the position in society. He was engaged in godfather racketeering in the city and region, he paid well and was not a homosexual, which Kobanenko was very afraid of. It was the duty of the bodyguards to bring the girls to him and to see them off too. "Just don't cut them, dear, if they don't give you," the godfather joked, although Kobanenko never told him about his past.

Once he, along with another bodyguard, accompanied the godfather to the local bazaar, from which he took a stable tribute. Everyone in the market knew the godfather. Merchants and police were the same respectful.

Suddenly, some elderly Turkmen rushed at the godfather with a knife.

The times were still quite patriarchal: there were few firearms on hand and it was used publicly in the rarest cases. They worked mainly with knives and sharpeners. The Kirghiz sometimes used bows, but also in exceptional cases.

The Turkmen, apparently a shot sparrow, used a well-known Asian technique: a jump-flight with an outstretched arm with a thirty-centimeter knife clamped in it.

Kobanenko managed to get between him and the godfather and received a knife in the chest. The second bodyguard shot the Turkmen without a second of delay.

The godfather did not bat an eyelid, but only doubled the tribute that the market paid him. The head of the police post in the market, a fat major, crying, accompanied the godfather to the car, handing him a whole diplomat of money: his own baksheesh for the whole working day. After all, everything happened at his facility. And Kobanenko was taken away by an ambulance. The godfather visited him in the hospital.

I donated 20 thousand rubles and got some "American" medicine. "Otherwise I would have given up," Kobaieiko explained.

He was discharged from the hospital after a couple of months. The godfather welcomed him as if he were his own. In Asia, loyal people are valued, and the one who shed blood for the owner is doubly appreciated. And they raise. Belova-Kobanenko was also promoted. The godfather told him that a big man had heard about the feat in the bazaar. The same person to whom the godfather gave 70% of his earnings every month. And he wants to take Kobanenko to him. It's a pity to give it away, but you can't argue with such a person. They sat all night, drinking cognac, and in the morning the godfather gave him a savings book to bearer, which indicated 50 thousand rubles.

The fact that the new owner is a big man, Kobanenko understood not only from the peacocks, importantly walking around the huge luxurious park, not from the fabulous palace, which stood on a hillock, from where wide marble stairs ran down to the wonderful lake, but from the behavior of the godfather. The godfather - a hard and proud man, constantly emphasizing his independence - almost fell on his face in front of a small dark-haired man, sitting on pillows in a silk dressing gown. The little man was the first secretary of the regional committee of the CPSU, as evidenced by the portrait of Lenin above his head. Kobanenko already noticed then that it was painful for Lenin in that portrait to have slanted eyes, like those of a Chinese. Later, knowledgeable people told him that this is exactly what the leader of the world proletariat looked like: all in a Kalmyk father. This portrait was considered secret, and the secretary of the regional committee from Moscow received it for a very large sum of money.

The region occupied the territory of the former emirate, but, probably, none of the emirs used such power and did not live in such luxury as the current secretary of the regional committee, who came to his post after many scandalous revelations by the investigator Gdlyan. He had 46 bodyguards. They were commanded by a gloomy Uzbek major from the local KGB. He spoke only his own language with the owner. Everyone else contact the owner

was forbidden.

At first, the service was easy. Kobanenko guarded the territory of the park, lived in a small house where the guards were located. Except for the major, almost all of them were Russians, most of them having gone through Afghanistan. The major himself also once mentioned that he had been to Afghanistan in the line of his service. They fed well. On weekends, cognac and wine were brought from the owner, about half a bottle per nose. They paid 1200 rubles a month. With Kobanenko, as, indeed, with everyone else, they took a non-disclosure agreement under pain of imprisonment for up to 7 years. But everyone knew very well that no one would give you any term, but they would simply sew it on and be done with it. With godfather everything was also without any subscriptions.

The new owner had a harem. The most real harem by all the rules. At the entrance to the harem hung his own portrait in a suit with a tie, with the star of the Hero of Socialist Labor and the Order of Lenin: There was also a eunuch, an incomprehensible man of about forty, always silent. It was said that his tongue was cut out. But he seemed to have a tongue. And some creature in a veil was in charge of the harem. No one has seen this creature without a veil. It shouted at the guards in a low female voice, and huge red paws stuck out of the sleeves, horseshoes could only be broken. Kobanenko was inclined to think that it was also a eunuch with quirks. And the silent eunuch somehow disappeared. Viktor Ivanovich found his dead head in a cesspool. Maybe it was chopped off, or maybe it was just sucked into the shit, only the head was sticking out. Heads were often found there, because among the attractions of the secretarial palace was also an underground prison. Kobanenko had to not only visit it, but also be on duty. There were no cells, as such, in the prison, but there were concrete pits where some people were sitting in chains and stocks. It seems that there were no Russians among them. They were numbered. They were fed with bread and water every other day. The prisoners howled and shouted, but they did not say anything articulate, at least in the presence of Kobanenko.

The owner himself sometimes visited the prison. He stood over the pits, shone a lantern in them, and sometimes talked about something with the prisoners in his own language. He spoke slowly and significantly. The prisoners squealed something nervously in response. When leaving, the owner gave instructions to throw scorpions, snakes or rats into some hole, pour cold water and the like. The menagerie was served by two shifting Tajiks in police uniforms without shoulder straps. Kobanenko himself did not do this, since he was more afraid of death than all this evil since the days of Afghanistan.

Everything else Kobanenko was not very surprised. He himself served in the special prison of the PDPA in Kabul, where something was cleaner.

Surprised by something else. Once, an Uzbek major called him to his office and handed him a certificate of a KGB warrant officer, from which it was clear that warrant officer Viktor Ivanovich Belov was serving in a security unit. And there was the number of the military unit. Along with the certificate, he was also given a Komsomol ticket, carefully calculating contributions for each paycheck.

Nobody was allowed to leave the territory of the mansion, except for those who accompanied the owner, who was leaving in one of the five cars, among which the American Lincoln Continental limousine stood out. The owner himself and seven guards, not counting the driver, were placed in it. Someone told Kobanenko that the American president himself drives such a car, only worse. Ahead and behind, too, there were cars with guards. When the cavalcade drove out of the gate, police jeeps were attached to it in front and behind and led the column, flashing signal lights and howling special sirens. Kobanenko never drove in these cars. Yes, and not very eager.

After about six months of his new service, all off-duty guards were ordered to line up not far from the house where they lived. The owner himself appeared, in a strict suit with the star of the Hero and the Order of Lenin, holding some papers in his hands. The May Day holidays were approaching, followed by the tradition of Victory Day. Master

read out the incentive order. Someone an award of three salaries, someone a medal. Kobanenko heard his new surname and was surprised to learn that for success in the service he was awarded the rank of lieutenant. Everything was as it should be: they changed the certificate and increased the salary to 1500 rubles.

Then there was a solemn dinner with cognac and wine. And then the service flowed as usual. There was no TV or radio at the guards. The owner, of course, had a TV - a large one, it seems, Japanese. Some crowds showed with banners. Everything is as usual and uninteresting.

The owner often began to leave somewhere, sometimes disappearing for several weeks. The bodyguards also disappeared. They left with the owner and did not return. The Uzbek major also disappeared. There were only 15 guards left, no more. Almost all lieutenants, several ensigns. The veiled eunuch pointed his thick finger at Kobanenko and said in Russian: "You are the elder." But this did not affect the service in any way.

The next day, Vector Ivanovich was on duty at the gate when the owner's "Continental" drove through them. The car slowed down. The owner was without security, only with a driver. He lowered the window and said: "Comrade Belov, come to me in an hour."

Having changed, Kobanenko went to the mansion. The owner received him in a small room, strictly furnished in an official spirit, without any carpets and antiques, without firebirds and peacocks. Tables, chairs, and a portrait of Gorbachev on the wall.

"Comrade Belov," the owner asked, "how do you like our service?"

Belov replied that everything was fine, he was satisfied with the service. Although, to tell the truth, all this began to oppress him. Sometimes with a godfather it was possible to get drunk from the heart, and glue the girl, go to the cinema or go to football there. In Kabul, even that was more free. There was even a thought to tear away from here, but it was scary both for the past and for the future. Desertion again? After all, she is still in the service, and all past sins are covered by her. For now, anyway.

"Comrade Belov," continued the first secretary, looking unblinkingly at Kobanenko with his slanted eyes. "You will be given great confidence.

Viktor Ivanovich did not know what to answer. "I serve the Soviet Union" - it seemed out of place. "Thank you," - also somehow did not fit in this case. He said nothing.

"Tomorrow you will come with me," said the host. — Leave the documents in part.

And he handed Belov an ordinary civil passport.

Returning to the security dormitory, Belov leafed through his new passport. Everything was correct, only in the registration column was the address on some Torfyanaya street with the house number, but without the apartment. Registration was temporary.

On the morning of the next day, for the first time since the beginning of the service, Viktor Ivanovich left the gates of the secretary's estate. I sat in the back seat of some huge limousine, the brand of which I did not know. "Lincoln-Continental" the owner left at home for prevention.

We left the city, turned somewhere into the steppe and drove up to a concrete fence with a blank iron gate. What the owner or his driver did there, Belov cannot say, but the gates silently parted and the car drove into a territory that outwardly resembled the territory of an ordinary military unit. White three-story houses, smooth, sandy paths, a stand with members of the Politburo, luridly drawn posters with squinted Ilyich: "You are on the right path, comrades!", with the slogans "To the left of the CPSU!" And

"The people and the party are united." There was everything for a military garrison town. Only there were no soldiers. Those who came across at the buildings were in civilian clothes, and at the checkpoint there were some guys in green overalls, but without weapons and insignia.

We drove up to a clean, pleasant three-story house, on which a banner blazed kumachevo: "Communism is the youth of the world and it must be built by the young." We went inside. Behind the affably open glass door was a tightly closed iron one, and maybe even an armored one. On the door was a disk like a telephone. The owner dialed a few numbers, and the door silently slid aside. Behind her were two guards in blue denim overalls. At the sight of their master, they jumped up, but did not stretch out at ease, as Kobanenko expected, but bowed low. Both looked Russian. The owner did not even spare them a glance and went to another door with a dial lock. He opened it and they found themselves in an elevator car. There were no buttons in the elevator. And there was nothing at all. How the elevator is controlled, Viktor Ivanovich did not understand.

They went out into a vast room lit by fluorescent lamps. In the room, almost to the ceiling, there were boxes, it seems, steel and sealed. Maybe someone was in the room, but Kobanenko did not notice anyone. Moreover, the owner walked through the room with a quick step, led Kobanenko into a dimly lit corridor, at the end of which an iron staircase, similar to a ship's ladder, led down. The stairs led to another steel door, closed from the inside, but equipped with a bell. The first secretary rang, some guys with Asian muzzled faces opened the door. At the sight of their master, they did not show any external signs of boundless devotion, but only looked at him inquiringly. The owner made a sign with his hand. One of those present, obeying a sign, took a bunch of keys from the wall and opened the inner door, which, unlike all other doors, opened with a clang. The door led to a small dressing room, at the end of which there was another door, upholstered in felt. The guard opened it with a large key from a bunch.

It smelled of dampness, shit and some other terrible and incomprehensible smells. Along with a gamut of disgusting smells, someone's terrible scream fell upon the newcomers. Not even a cry, but an animal howl or roar. This can be heard when inept hands cut a pig, only here it was much lower in tone. Kobanenko became scared. He, with his adventurous and reckless nature (someone else's life is a penny, and his own is a ruble), was rarely truly scared.

Once in Kabul, when two of his friends were killed in front of his eyes, but for some reason he was not there. No one noticed where the bullets came from. Some kind of fence. Looking at his dead colleagues, Kobanenko waited for his bullet, but it never arrived. For a long time afterwards he could not sleep. Saved the drugs. The second time it became scary after the incident on the dance floor, when after the interrogation I sobered up and realized that I needed to run immediately.

And now. Where are they taking him? Thought worked feverishly. The owner does not count - he will knock him out with one little finger. It will be more difficult with a gorilla in denim overalls, but if you start with him while walking in front, with an unexpected blow to the back of the cervical vertebrae, he might be able to handle it. Unaccountable fear always gives determination. But reason conquered fear. Even if he killed them both, how would he get out of here? Kohl remember how they got here ... By an effort of will, he pulled himself together, trying to calm down.

As the three of them walked along the half-dark, dirty corridor that smelled of shit and carrion, the source of the howl approached. Finally, a guy in denim overalls stopped at one of the doors with a barred window and looked inquiringly at the owner. A terrible howl, pressing on the ears, came precisely from behind this door.

Kobanenko had heard before that there were almost more underground prisons in the republic than

schools and hospitals combined, but did not imagine that they could be under any outwardly unremarkable house.

The first secretary gestured for the door to be opened.

From a wave of howling, stench and rot, Kobanenko's eyes darkened and his head began to spin. The owner entered the cell, with a wave of his hand, inviting Belov to follow him.

Approximately one and a half meters from the entrance to the chamber began a concreted pit about two meters deep. A naked man sat against one of the walls of the pit, howling and roaring. His hands, like those of a crucified man, were chained to rings set into the concrete of the walls, and his legs to the same rings set into the concrete of the bottom. And in his crotch, eating the genitals, swarming two dozen huge rats.

Kobanenko at first sight recognized the suicide bomber being eaten by rats as an Uzbek major who commanded their unit and disappeared a couple of weeks ago. The major howled and roared, but his eyes were empty and motionless. Apparently, they made some kind of injection so that he would not quickly lose consciousness from shock or fear. In order to have time to realize the guilt, as they said in Afghanistan, putting on an iron stake of a special forging. Asia!

Viktor Ivanovich was not so much afraid to look at his former commander and listen to his already inhuman howl, but to smell this smell that came from the pit, where the rats, climbing on top of each other, pushing in the blood spreading between the major's legs along the bottom of the pit, mixed with the howl killed by his gambling and piercing squeal.

The owner looked at Belov-Kobanenko and said: "This powder is special. The Americans invented it for agriculture. It attracts rodents and kills them. But it is harmless to humans. They sent us to raise agriculture."

He laughed hoarsely, apparently drunk from the observed picture, which gave him some kind of narcotic pleasure. With a wink, he said to Viktor Ivanovich, choking with laughter: "We smeared his eggs and dick with this powder. The rats will die before he does."

The owner's eyes sparkled. He shouted something into the hole in his own language, then unbuttoned his trousers and began to urinate on the unfortunate major's head. And then, to Kobanenko's greatest surprise, squealing and panting, he began to masturbate, jumping right on the edge of the pit. It seemed to Belov-Kobanenko that the owner would now jump into the pit and merge with the major, rats and blood in some kind of terrible ecstasy. Belov leaned against the wall so as not to fall.

The first secretary buttoned his trousers. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief and, breathing heavily, said: "The trust was given. He did not justify. They called the Central Committee ... He let him down. Let him die for a long time, like a dog, in the basement."

Viktor Ivanovich did not remember how they ended up in the fresh air again. He finally came to his senses, sitting together with the owner in some kind of gazebo at a table on which stood a vase of fruit and a crystal decanter of cognac. A man in denim overalls was pouring cognac into piles.

"You will be trusted, Comrade Belov," said the owner, smiling softly, savoring the cognac. - Drink, Comrade Belov, do not be shy. Oh, good cognac. Eat a pomegranate. Goes very well.

Viktor Ivanovich felt that if he now ate or drank something, he would immediately be turned inside out right on the starched tablecloth. It was even a little embarrassing that he was such a weakling. Probably because of the smell of this American powder.

The trust that the owner, apparently, from a bad life, constantly promised to give him, conducting in parallel such a powerful moral and psychological treatment and demonstrating that he was waiting for someone who would not justify trust, was reduced to escorting cargo. The cargo was different: from packages placed in a diplomat to entire echelons and convoys. So Viktor Ivanovich improved in his current profession.

During this time he saw a lot, although he understood little. Entire echelons were driven underground in places where solid patches of taiga turned green on the geographical map, and even lakes turned blue. The echelon entered the tunnel and walked along the dimly lit tunnel for five hours. He approached the underground station, where Belov was met by some incomprehensible people in an even more incomprehensible form, they took the train, and they gave him a receipt for accepting the cargo and put on it the same stamp that was already on the escort. Stamps were different, but intricate. Most often in the form of beautiful oriental ornaments. Their owner had a whole box kept in a safe along with a thick explanatory book. The boss ran his finger over the pages of the book for a long time, moving his lips like a schoolboy, then he chose the right stamp and set it, giving it to Viktor Ivanovich and reminding him of the trust shown.

The echelons went somewhere further underground, and Viktor Ivanovich was brought to the light of God on a strange-looking railcar to the nearest legal station, in the commandant's office of which he was noted without a word on a business trip: Lieutenant Belov arrived and departed.

Sometimes I just traveled with a passport and did not mark a business trip. But he always received travel allowances: 7 rubles 50 kopecks per day, 3 rubles 60 kopecks - apartment. I handed over reports to the owner on a business trip: how much and where I spent. The owner or someone from the accounting department of the regional committee carefully checked these reports. The owner scolded for the money spent.

- Something with you, Comrade Belov, 75 rubles do not converge on the last business trip, - he said, slyly screwing up his Asian eyes. Drinking, perhaps?

Indeed, Kobanenko began to drink heavily, although he also tried to control himself. He always liked to drink, sometimes getting drunk to the point of insensibility, but it was at times, so to speak, for relaxation. But then there was a need to drink almost every hour. I brought vodka in a thermos. When I went alone, it seemed to go away, but when with a team, you can't hide this. Someone snitched. Knowing that such offenses, if they do not harm the cause, the owner is condescending, Viktor Ivanovich nevertheless lied: "I bought a sweater for 70 rubles. It was cold. I was afraid to catch a cold." The owner smiled: "Okay, we know these sweaters." He himself has recently become simpler and more accessible. He also constantly traveled somewhere, flew on a private plane, disappearing for a week, or even more.

The estate is almost deserted. The harem disappeared, almost no one was left from the guards, the peacocks disappeared. Everything somehow fell into disrepair. At the entrance to the estate, some people in police uniforms began to be on duty. Once returning from a business trip, Kobanenko saw that the underground prison had been destroyed. Construction debris was still lying around, but the place itself had already been asphalted. There were two skating rinks. And the guard house, it turns out, burned down in his absence along with a few personal belongings of Viktor Ivanovich. It's good that before the fire, the owner ordered all documents and passbooks to be transferred to his safe.

"Do not grieve, Comrade Belov," the first secretary reassured him. We'll build a new one. It will be even better. In the meantime, sleep in my mansion.

The mansion was no longer the same. Many premises and rooms were empty. The rich carpets that covered the satin upholstery of the walls and the mosaic parquet of the floor disappeared, precious vases and paintings, ancient weapons and luxurious furniture disappeared.

"We will soon be moving to a new place, Comrade Belov," the owner smiled.

"Isn't it in jail?" a malicious thought flashed through Belov-Kobanenko.

He spent the night on a sofa in some small room next to the catering unit, and in the morning, together with the owner, we went to that mysterious place where the rats had eaten the unfortunate Uzbek major alive. We drove in a beige Volga. The limousines also disappeared somewhere.

The first secretary was in a good mood. He said that he would send Viktor Ivanovich on an assignment to Moscow, and then let him go on vacation for two months. If necessary, he will give a free ticket to the sanatorium of the Central Committee. And he showed Viktor Ivanovich a passbook to bearer. He took his breath away: 300 thousand rubles. Yes, and on old books there were already 150 thousand. You could try to mow down, retire, buy a house, a car, and live like a human being.

"It's a bonus when you get back," the owner said, putting the passbook in his pocket.

We arrived at the base. We stopped at the open gate, from where a column of closed trucks was leaving. Approximately such a column Viktor Ivanovich once accompanied to Chelyabinsk, bringing it to almost the same base, similar to a military one, but without military ones. True, they went there not in denim overalls, but in "not ours" khaki jackets.

The owner's office at the base was modest. No frills. Polished furniture. Meeting table. Japanese TV. Portrait of Marx. Herd of phones. In a special place is an apparatus decorated with the coat of arms of the USSR. Even more modest than in the regional committee itself, in the center of the regional capital - the former capital of the emirate.

"You will receive a responsible task, Comrade Belov," the owner said, taking out a "diplomat" with a dial lock from the safe.

The essence of the responsible task was to deliver the "diplomat" to Moscow and hand him over personally to Comrade Fyodor Valin, whom Belov was supposed to call from the reception of the Central Committee. Be sure to take a receipt and return back. Introduce yourself officially: a field courier from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Republic.

"And then go on vacation, Comrade Belov," the owner repeated. - Rest a lot. Improve your health.

Passing the "diplomat" to Viktor Ivanovich, he warned: "You can't turn the lock. The mine is there. Be careful, Comrade Belov. Remember the trust shown ..."

It was the height of the summer of 1991. Viktor Ivanovich issued a business trip on July 28 for three weeks and drove off to Moscow with the coveted "diplomat", already accustomed to riding in a special compartment for one person. Such tickets were given to him personally by the owner, there and back. But now he only issued it to Moscow, ordering him to take a return ticket to the Central Committee of the CPSU. Everyone there knows.

Everyone there really knew. Right at the exit of the car, two good fellows met Belov and put him in a black Volga, on which he drove straight to entrance No. 7 of the building of the Central Committee of the CPSU on Staraya Square. Passing along the red carpet of long bright corridors, Kobanenko was led into a huge reception room, into which, like royal doors; oak doors came out with a sign that looked like a memorial plaque: Head of the International Department Comrade. Valin Fedor Nikolaevich.

Orobek Viktor Ivanovich He had never climbed so high before. If you think that his owner is just the first secretary of the regional committee, then what kind of palace should Comrade Valin have, standing as much higher than the world as only Allah can stand.

One of the fine fellows who brought Viktor Ivanovich picked up the telephone receiver on the table near the entrance and said something into it. Then he hung up the phone. About five minutes later the phone rang.

"Comrade Belov," said the good fellow, nodding his head in the direction of the door. - Come on in.

Comrade Valin was sitting alone in his huge office and, to the surprise of Viktor Ivanovich, was in a frank hangover. His face was purple, his eyes watery. On the polished smooth surface of a large bossy table, pushing telephones and telecommunications, stood five or six bottles of some kind of foreign beer. Half of them are empty. Comrade Valin finished his glass of beer.

- Did you bring it? he asked, hiccupping.

"That's right," Viktor Ivanovich answered modestly.

- Come here! Comrade Valin hiccuped again. - Put it on the table.

Comrade Valin took hold of the lock and began to turn the discs. Kobanenko remembered the mine and closed his eyes in horror.

But nothing happened. "Diplomat" opened. It contained a large plastic shopping bag stuffed with \$1,000 bills of wrapped wads of dollars. Comrade Valin got up with a visible effort, opened a safe built into the wall, threw in a sack, and from there took out a bottle, which, as it seemed to Viktor Ivanovich, contained cheap Agdam port wine. He poured half a glass, added beer and drank in one gulp. Then he carefully closed the bottle, put it back, but left the safe itself ajar. He poured himself another beer, but before drinking, he looked with red eyes at Belov.

- What else do you want? Go!

"A receipt," Kobanenko said respectfully. - A receipt that they received a "diplomat". That's all right.

- Who ordered? Comrade Valin choked on the beer that ran down his chin.

He wiped the beer off with the sleeve of an expensive foreign jacket and asked again in a hoarse voice.

- What receipt do you want? Who ordered?

Viktor Ivanovich recalled who sent him.

- Fucking chump! Comrade Valin reacted. I'll give him a receipt! In his village, let him take receipts from the black-assed ones! Go, I told you! Don't stop working!

How one of the good fellows arose from under the ground.

Give him a receipt between the eyes! Comrade Valin laughed drunkenly. - One never to be forgotten.

"Don't worry, Comrade Belov," said the hero, pushing Viktor Ivanovich into the waiting room. - Get your receipt. This is what our office does. Come the day after tomorrow, no, better in four days to the reception of the Central Committee. We will drop there.

This was not the case in Kobanenko's practice.

- Can I call? he asked a pleasant, smiling fellow.

Where do you want to call? he asked.

"I want to call my superiors," Viktor Ivanovich said rudely. - warn that

I'll be late.

The good man made a distressed face:

We only have local phones here. Not even a city. You call from the city. At the end of Gorky Street there is a central telegraph office and a telephone station. Call anywhere from there
Can.

Together they led Kobanenko along the corridors. One in front, one behind. Like under guard.

Brought to the outer guard.

One of them showed his ID to a guard in OMON uniform with a machine gun:

- Let him go.

The riot policeman did not say a word, and Viktor Ivanovich went out into the street.

Even before that, he had repeatedly had to call his boss from different places, but at the same time he always used special communications, which worked quickly and accurately.

It takes a long time to call from a long-distance station and unsuccessfully. In the estate, all the phones were busy for a long time, and then no one came up. The same thing happened in the regional committee. Finally, a voice with a strong non-Russian accent answered in the manor.

Viktor Ivanovich asked the owner.

"She left," said the voice.

- When will he come? Kobanenko yelled into the phone.

"She's gone far away," the voice answered, and hung up.

The voice was completely unfamiliar, although Kobanenko believed that he knew everything.
left on the estate.

Leaving the telephone exchange, Viktor Ivanovich remembered that he had not taken the direction token to the hotel. I went back to the reception of the Central Committee and called the phone, the number of which I received from the owner.

Judging by the voice, one of the good fellows already familiar to Belov answered. Hearing Viktor Ivanovich, he was not surprised, listened to everything to the end and politely said: "Listen, Comrade Belov. Do not test our patience. Stop your hooligan antics. You don't want us to call the police? The receptionist will be taken away. You insulted comrade Valin and continue to hooligan. We are all for democracy and pluralism of opinions, but one must know when to stop, "and hung up.

The fact that the matter in the Central Committee was put on tight, Kobanenko was convinced when he hung up the receiver in his turn and left the booth. A policeman was standing in front of him. The policeman put his hand to the visor and asked: "What are you doing here, citizen? It's not supposed to be here just like that. Do you have any documents?"

It was the police that Kobanenko-Belov was afraid of, like fire. Most of all I was afraid to get there on any occasion. The All-Union wanted list in any regional department is easily identified without any computers. With the help of simple albums and some tricks, which are colloquially called "cops".

Viktor Ivanovich showed his passport, temporarily registered on Torfyanaya Street.

The sergeant leafed through it and returned it: "Go, citizen, from here. Don't interfere with people's work."

Viktor Ivanovich understood that no one had anything against him personally. If they wanted to destroy or isolate him, they would do it with extraordinary ease. He would never leave the building of the Central Committee. And here in the reception room, where a whole platoon from Lubyanka is always on duty, they would not send an ordinary "cop" to check his passport. It is brushed off like a harmless fly, hoping that the fly itself will understand how easy it is to swat.

And Kobanenko understood. I decided to leave Moscow tomorrow, or better, fly away.

Having pushed around Moscow, I settled down somewhere in Medvedkovo in some hotel on a cot to spend the night. In the morning I handed over the cot and decided to go to the Aeroflot ticket office to get a ticket for the next plane. All this was new, because in all previous cases it was done for him quickly and efficiently.

I took a bus to the metro station "VDNKh" and went to the center. It seemed to him that the people in the carriage were somehow nervous and excited. Everyone was excitedly talking to each other, arguing about something, discussing something.

Not understanding what so disturbed the usually sleepy Muscovites, Kobanenko got off the train on Sverdlov Square and the first thing he saw, going upstairs, was a pair of heavy tanks, menacingly rotating turrets with long gun barrels. A little further away stood infantry fighting vehicles in patches of camouflage. A tanker was sitting on the turret of the nearest tank, ruefully chewing on a loaf, washing it down with kefir from a bottle. In a nearby headquarters jeep, some major in a tanker's helmet was shouting something hysterically into the receiver of a field radiotelephone, as if air bombs were raining down on him. Citizens stood around the military equipment, about something rather peacefully, but with signs of obvious discontent, talking with the soldiers. On some tanks, squealing with delight, already garlands

boys hung.

Viktor Ivanovich stopped in bewilderment and asked the first passerby he came across:

- Has the war started?

- No, - answered the passerby, - not a war. How is it? I forgot some word not ours. Dust like. No, not dust. Bed bugs are poisoned with dust. Well, something like.

After some time, Kobanenko found out that this unfamiliar word is called "putsch". He did not know the word and did not understand what it meant. Crowds of people marched along the streets behind the tanks and in front of them, waving tricolor flags and some slogans. Grandmothers from bags right through the open hatches fed the tankers, cried and were baptized. Some guys with microphones were scurrying to TV cameras. Police cars howled with sirens, street loudspeakers continuously broadcast something.

The day began on August 19, 1991.

Viktor Ivanovich got to the box office of Aeroflot, where he learned that President Gorbachev had fallen ill and a spontaneous holiday began on the streets on this occasion. Gorbachev got angry and ordered to bring tanks into the city, but the tankers also rejoice with all the people. Kobanenko collected all this information while standing in a small queue at the cashier and listening very inattentively. I bought a ticket and went to the airport. The bus zigzag between different samples of military equipment, damming the streets of the capital.

The plane took off exactly on schedule, but made an unscheduled landing in Kazan, where it stood for about three days. Either they did not give a flight, or they did not accept the Tashkent airport.

Wandering around the airport terminal, Kobanenko learned that there was an uprising against the communists in Moscow, President Gorbachev fled to the Crimea, where he was gathering troops to march on Moscow.

All civil aviation flights have been canceled as the mobilization of the five ages has been announced. Aircraft will carry reservists. As if to confirm these words, a flight of fighters passed low over the air terminal, dropping a bunch of leaflets. The leaflets contained an order from the commander of the Volga-Urals Military District, Colonel-General Makashov, where the district entrusted to him urged to be ready for the opening of hostilities, and the entire population to rise to fight the cosmopolitans. Who the cosmopolitans were, Viktor Ivanovich did not know, he wanted to fly away from here faster.

Some lieutenant colonel appeared in the terminal building with an armband of an assistant city commandant and announced through a loudspeaker that in connection with the introduction of a state of emergency throughout the USSR, all servicemen were ordered to return to their units. All vacations and business trips have been cancelled. Transit officers are asked to report to the airport commandant's office. They will be sent first. Somewhere women sobbed hysterically, children echoed them. The officers gathered in groups, discussing something. But no one was in a hurry to follow the order of the assistant commandant. If Viktor Ivanovich had at least some documents confirming that he was an officer, he would certainly use this to fly away from here earlier. But he did not have such documents, but only a passport registered on Torfyanaya Street.

So two days passed. Landing was not announced for any flight. Through the speakers poured someone's speech, menacing and ferocious. Crowds of people stood looking at a television hanging from the ceiling, from the screen of which they watched either tank barrels or someone's distorted faces. Viktor Ivanovich was not interested in all this, and he went to a restaurant, bought a bottle of vodka at the local price, stole a glass from a soda machine, settled down in some corner, greedily drank two glasses, drank the rest from his throat, curled up and fell asleep.

So he skied for almost three days and only at the end of the fourth he reached Tashkent. Of course, no one met him. I shaved at the airport barbershop and got to my regional center on regular buses. There he took a taxi and went to the estate to the owner. Yes, apparently, Viktor Ivanovich forgot that on the road that led to the estate from the highway there was a checkpoint with a barrier. I forgot, because this barrier, guarded by KGB ensigns, was never closed when they traveled with the owner. It was always open, and ensigns took under the visor. But this time it was closed. Kobanenko got out of the car and approached the guards. The ensign with an unpleasant face and watery eyes, seeing Viktor Ivanovich, inquired rudely: "What do you need?"

Viktor Ivanovich explained that he was one of the attendants of the country house of the first secretary of the regional committee, that his surname was Belov and all that.

- Do you have a pass? asked the lieutenant.

There was no gap, and there never was. Traveled all the time with the owner.

- Can I call you? Kobanenko-Belov asked the ensign in the most plaintive tone.

- You can call, - the ensign said conciliatorily. "But there is no one there. I tell you exactly. And your master left somewhere in early August.

And, lowering his voice, he added:

- If you really worked here, then hide somewhere. The prosecutor's office is looking for the owner of yours with dogs. See that you don't get raked in his place.

— Why him? - Kobanenko did not understand and even backed away from amazement.

"You fell off the moon, boy," the ensign laughed. - It seems Russian, and not a chock, but you play the fool. You don't see what's going on in the country. Let's go back to the city. And don't show up here, or I'll hand you over to the right place.

Viktor Ivanovich returned to the city and went to the regional party committee. The building of the regional committee was closed and sealed.

And then Kobanenko finally realized that something terrible had happened in the country, because the word "coup d'état" was too complicated for him.

There was an idea to go to the base where the rats were eating off the major's genitals, but he immediately discarded the idea of \u200b\u200batu. We went with the owner - and then three barriers passed. And all were closed. Some scoundrels looked into the car, squinting inquiringly at Kobanenko, and the owner always said: "This is with me."

I went to look for Peat Street, where I was temporarily registered. You had to live somewhere. It turned out that there is no such street in the city, but there is Torfyanikov Street. In the house in which Belov Viktor Ivanovich was allegedly temporarily registered, there was a police station, and a fire station nearby.

Overnight at the train station. Gradually I began to understand what position I was in. The officer's papers remained with the owner. There are also savings books. Passbooks to bearer - whoever wants, he will receive the money. Where to go and what to do is unknown. The money was running out.

There was nothing to do, went to the market in the hope of finding a godfather. It was possible to find out that the godfather has not been in the city for a long time. Moved north, almost to Leningrad. He does some great work...

- And what is the name of your godfather, - Kobanenko Berkesov interrupted his confession for the first time. — Don't remember?

"I never knew his last name," Viktor Ivanovich admitted. Everyone called him Alik.

Berkesov marked something on his calendar.

"Go on," he said to the detainee.

There are no hopeless situations, and if there are, it is very rare.

With the last money, Viktor Ivanovich brought himself more or less in order and went to some club for an evening of rest "who is over 30." There he rented a "woman" older than himself, but nothing else. He began to live with her, moonlighting as a loader in a nearby store. He drank himself to hell several times, thank God he didn't kill anyone. Only once he beat his cohabitant hard, but without the police. Reconciled. He regretted the missing money, but as wild inflation began, he stopped regretting it. Let the one who received them choke. On reflection, Viktor Ivanovich realized much later that he should thank fate and personally Comrade Valin for staying in Moscow. If he had arrived back in time, the owner would definitely have ordered him to be liquidated. Just in case. He did not regret that the diplomat, stuffed with dollars, handed over as ordered. He wouldn't go anywhere with those dollars. Found at the end of the world. Because they found it without dollars.

Once loaded an empty container on a car in a store. He was slightly drunk and angry, like any person doing physical work in the sun. Suddenly, someone called out: "Belov! Viktor Ivanovich! Is that you?"

I looked back. The guy is standing. Looks younger than him. In full outfit: black jacket, leather pants tucked into low boots. You can evaporate in such a uniform. And what exactly could Viktor Ivanovich say: he had never seen and did not know this pariah.

"You confused me with someone," Kobanenko replied, spitting a cigarette butt on the ground and throwing boxes into the truck.

"Come on, Vitek, pretending to be someone you don't know," the unknown responded without malice. - I say there is a conversation. Don't be afraid. If it weren't so, you would have been dead a long time ago. Went. It's close here.

Viktor Ivanovich wiped his hands on his apron and followed the guy. They circled the store. There, almost opposite the entrance, the gray Niva crouched in the dust and heat. The guy remained on the street, and in the car was a short, broad-shouldered man, overgrown to the eyes with a black beard, with huge red paws.

"Hello, Viktor Ivanovich," he greeted Belov in a high, thin voice, so out of keeping with his square appearance. Both by voice and by hands Viktor Ivanovich recognized the "veiled grandson", with whom he served the owner's estate together.

"My name is Dzhavar Kerimovich," the "eunuch" smiled, seeing that he was recognized. "How are you, Comrade Belov?"

We talked, remembered the old. Viktor Ivanovich found out that the owner now lives in Bahrain in his own palace, in comparison with which his mansion on the estate would look like a miserable shack both in terms of exterior and interior. It turned out that he is a distant relative of the local sultan and is now one of the most respected for the wealth and origin of the sheikhs of the sultan, co-owner of a controlling stake in oil shares. He remembers his people and hopes that they will serve him again. He regrets that then he had to leave so hastily that he did not have time to say goodbye to anyone.

And as if answering Viktor Ivanovich's silent question, the "eunuch" handed him a bearer passbook with 200 thousand rubles.

- Dress up, buy what you need, - ordered Dzhavar Kerimovich, - and come to Tashkent by next Tuesday.

And he gave a phone number on a piece of paper: "Call. They will come for you."

On the appointed day, Viktor Ivanovich appeared as a swarthy, stocky oriental man who spoke Russian with some kind of non-local accent. Where they were, Viktor Ivanovich did not know. They brought him to some two-story mansion outside the city, hidden behind a high fence in the depths of the garden.

The man did not offer to sit down. He asked a few trifling questions: about age, marital status and health. What followed was short.

You have been recommended for a very important job. We know that you are able to justify the trust. Go to Arzamas, call this number, say that it's from Nikolai. They will come for you. Show them this business card.

The card depicted an oriental ornament, in the middle of which was some kind of Arabic letter.

On that they said goodbye. The man did not shake hands, but asked if Viktor Ivanovich had the money to get to Arzamas.

Viktor Ivanovich did not lie. There is money.

True, what is now 200 thousand? Ugh and grind.

Two people came by phone. They examined the business card through a magnifying glass. They put Viktor Ivanovich in a car, brought him to a chic building on the outskirts, on which hung a large board "Joint commercial enterprise Amethyst. Export-import operations."

And there is no regime in the building itself. Not even visible security. Democracy. Those who brought Viktor Ivanovich said: go up to the third floor. There is the office of the head of the transportation department. He is waiting for you. If you want a bite to eat, then the dining room is in our basement.

Apparently, the time has come in the life of Viktor Ivanovich to meet old acquaintances and pretend that there is nothing surprising in this.

The head of the transportation department, smiling, left the table and shook Belov's hand, adding: "Here, Viktor Ivanovich, as they say: mountain and mountain do not converge ..."

And it was the same "good fellow" that just recently escorted Kobanenko out of Comrade Valin's waiting room. The young man's name was Dmitry Alekseevich. Until August 1991, he was a lieutenant colonel of the KGB, served in the famous "nine" of General Plekhanov, now languishing in Lefortovo.

On the occasion of such a cordial reception, Viktor Ivanovich dared to ask, what about Comrade Valin himself now?

"What will happen to him!" laughed Dmitry Alekseevich. - You and your "diplomat", Viktor Ivanovich, were probably the hundredth. What is he to do with that kind of money? He lives in Germany and wants everyone to live like him. Take everything out there. Even a collection of rare paintings that are not subject to export by law. What are laws to him? He wrote them himself. If he doesn't get drunk, we'll hear about him again. You don't get angry with him. According to all the rules, we should have issued you in the first class. But he did not. Others were not so kind, believe me. You could still work with him. And the fact that he is always drunk is not a problem. Here Solomentsev was always sober, but ... Come on, what's the past to remember. Shake his ashes from our feet.

Viktor Ivanovich did not specify what it means to "register in the first class", but he correctly understood that from that "squirrel wheel" where he fell after his wild antics drunk on the dance floor, there is no way out and never will, except perhaps through the pipe of the crematorium.

The work of Viktor Ivanovich again became cargo escort. One of the directors of the joint venture (the second, as Viktor Ivanovich guessed, was his former owner, a relative of the Sultan of Bahrain) is lean, with excellent bearing and arrogant posture, the former head of the KGB department in Saransk, who was subordinate to a whole network of special camps with political prisoners. None of his past did not make secrets, but on the contrary, he was proud and boasted. The general knew how to lead, did it sensibly and without fuss. At first, he was drawn to religion, he wanted to start every working day with a common prayer and even take a priest on the staff. And he ordered all employees to submit a certificate of baptism within three days. But somehow the matter itself died out. Apparently, the general believed that Orthodoxy would become a new state ideology, as it once was communist, and wanted to get ahead of events. But where are the churches before the CPSU, the kingdom of heaven to her! All this did not take root. And the general himself stopped being baptized, but in his office he left the image of Nikolai Ugodnik, hanging so cunningly that it was not clear

whether the director is a believer, or just a lover of national antiquities and antiques. But Viktor Ivanovich, when he was introduced by the head of the department, the first thing he asked was: "Do you believe in God?"

Kobanenko, instructed in advance, crossed himself on the image. Nicholas the Pleasant and without hesitation answered: "I believe. I believe in Christ."

"Well, that's good," the general smiled with thin lips. "Otherwise we were afraid that the last boss, the damned infidel, dragged you into Islam. And all our strength, Vitya, is in Orthodoxy."

"That's right," replied Kobanenko.

Viktor Ivanovich was appointed first as a deputy, and then as head of the cargo escort group.

At meetings, the director or head of the department explained: "Our company earns money in an honest and legal way. The client orders us the cargo and its delivery. And we deliver the cargo to the client. In a market economy, we are not interested in the personality of the client. We are interested in his solvency. We are not interested in what kind of cargo the client wanted to receive. We are obliged, upon receipt of the advance payment, to deliver the cargo to the specified place. The client is always right."

Kobanenko quickly figured out the interests of clients who were not particularly diverse. Clients were mainly interested in weapons and raw materials. From weapons - rockets, aircraft and components for them, from raw materials - non-ferrous and rare earth metals, And of course, oil and oil products. And, of course, clients were terribly fond of intimacy. Especially when it comes to weapons. And they paid extra for it. But, unfortunately, it was far from always possible to maintain intimacy in the conditions of information rampant and complete freedom against the backdrop of general anarchy, when for some reason everyone considered it his duty not so much to go about his own business, but to climb into someone else's. Not so much to earn money yourself, but not to let others earn money. This is the eternal Russian history. But the leaked information generated not only bewildered questions from the nascent tax service, but some worse.

Right at the Arzamas-tovarnaya railway station, a trainload of ammunition and explosives destined for one of the respected clients in Central Asia took off. The explosion destroyed the settlement near the station, screams began in the newspapers, various investigative commissions came in large numbers. It was hard to get away. The enterprise suffered significant losses, and its own investigation showed that the explosion was staged by competitors from a similar enterprise in Rostov-on-Don, which was also headed by a KGB general.

They had to destroy two trains with oil products, and only then gather, as expected, in Moscow in order to civilize the market and, instead of wild competition, come up with a scheme of interaction for the common good. Viktor Ivanovich accompanied his new bosses to the meeting as a bodyguard and a porter of suitcases. Forty people gathered from all over the former Union. Apparently, everyone knew each other before or, in the worst case, they had heard a lot about each other, since they served and worked in the same department. Handshakes, exclamations of surprise, remarks like: "But you didn't get a general?" - "Go and get it from us in Gorky. This is not with you in the Far East!" - "Listen, where are you from? They imprisoned you after the coup. I read it in the newspaper myself!" - "They imprisoned and released. Their handles are short, people like me should be kept behind bars!" - "Well, great, Nikolai Mitrofanovich! We haven't seen each other for a long time. I heard that the Jews and anti-Soviet people drank all the blood out of you!" - "Yes, choked! Well, and you're done! Instead of prison, they say, the following

I received the title so that my pension would be bigger. "-" Now this pension is like an umbrella for a fish. Let them choke. At least they started doing the real thing."

Viktor Ivanovich, of course, was not present at most of the meetings. He smoked in the hall with the rest of the bodyguards - gloomy and silent ambals, in the overwhelming majority - junior officers dismissed from the KGB for various reasons. Or dozing in the car. There was no point in talking to anyone. Yes, and Viktor Ivanovich was not talkative by nature. Also after all, after all, a former lieutenant of the KGB. And the documents were relevant. Not an impostor. Yours among yours.

What was agreed at the meeting became clear when, returning to Arzamas, the general held almost a scientific conference with his own employees. The enterprise, he explained, has to work not only in conditions of fierce competition dictated by new economic realities, but also in the face of opposition from the authorities of the current occupation government, which temporarily seized power in the country.

It is not our task to overthrow this government, the general specified. Our task is to fight it within the framework of our activities. In other words, we need to continue to do our job and make money, despite the slingshots that we are always given.

The work continued, but opposition was felt to be growing. Echelons were delayed, cargo was confiscated. Sometimes the echelons flew downhill. Armed attacks in places where no one could have thought of them before became more frequent. The web of new borders of the so-called "near abroad" created additional difficulties and costs. The general personally issued licenses-permits signed by the first people of the country from the safe to the senior cargo escort. Whether they were real or fake, no one knew. Sometimes these permits worked, sometimes they didn't. Sometimes no one asked them, but immediately opened fire and immediately received return fire. A new small disinformation department has been opened at the enterprises. Rumors spread in advance about the possible direction of the echelons, their cargo, destination, etc. In reality, the cargo followed a completely different route, in a different nomenclature, to a different client. And to prove the rumors, in line with the leakage of information, the so-called bait echelons followed. The authorities seized them and let them go with disappointment. Sometimes it happened that both the true cargo and the "bait" reached the target without interference.

Viktor Ivanovich himself drove six or seven, he no longer remembers, echelons with missiles to Tabriz. In the North Caucasus, he once had a real battle with the detachments of General Dudayev. The Chechens captured one echelon, but later returned it. They have not yet matured to such weapon systems.

And this time, Viktor Ivanovich was supposed to lead three trains to Tabriz, but at the last moment he was ordered to lead echelons to the north, to Leningrad, and another was assigned to the south direction ...

"To Tabriz," I said. - It is very interesting.

Berkesov asked me not to interfere with a glance and turned to Belov-Kobanenko:

- Viktor Ivanovich, put everything you have said in writing. More briefly, of course. But preferably with surnames that you know or remember.

Kobanenko stared at the floor.

- I will not write anything.

"I won't," repeated Berkesov. - I do not want and I will not. You might think that you told us everything in emptiness. However, your business. You don't want to write, but you have to.

The colonel paused, and then suddenly announced:

"Then, Comrade Belov, I have no right to detain you any longer. You can be free. The gun is yours, however, as long as we have any left. You don't have permission for it. Something our current bosses really imagine themselves in the American prairie. Yes, and you need to check it. It seems to me that this pistol has a rich biography. But these are all trifles, as you understand. The main thing: now settle your affairs with Marchenko, to whom you were supposed to hand over the cargo. Since the cargo is delayed, there will be difficulties with it both about its origin, and about its destination, and about the highest signatures on licenses. Suddenly they turn out to be fake? Then scandal. If they turn out to be real, the scandal will be even worse. So go ahead and sort out your business.

If I were Kobanenko, I would beg Berkesov on my knees to keep me for another two or three weeks in prison. But Viktor Ivanovich, apparently, still hoped for something. He is impetuous
jumped up and said:

Thank you, Comrade Colonel. You understand. I what? Small fry. What to ask me? Those girls on the dance floor? So when was it? In another historical era. As for the gun, God bless him. We'll get a new one if needed.

- Well, then I wish you success, - Berkesov laughed, - try not to get caught again.

Kobanenko, almost rejoicing, jumped out of the office, leaving me in complete bewilderment: are people really arranged in such a way that they do not understand their doom?

IX

In principle, Belov-Kobanenko did not say anything particularly sensational. Although he was given confidence, but, I must say, not particularly great. It is understandable. People of this stature and past are never trusted much. I had to read the reports of our resident for Central Asia, John Mamliiev. Things were going on there that Viktor Kobanenko would not have dreamed of even in a nightmare. One of the most innocent activities was the sale of girls to harems and brothels along the Afro-Asian coast from Singapore to Georgetown. A thousand dollars apiece.

The girls were sold in whole classes. They were put on a bus, allegedly sent to pick cotton (however, they came up with various reasons: excursions to the center, health trips, holiday camps, etc.)" and they disappeared without a trace. Relatives were very affectively gagged with money or a bullet, if they became very stubborn. With no less success and even somewhat more expensive, young men were sold - simply into slavery or for some special purposes that were closely related to the business conceived by the retired general Orlov.

Before the August coup, in the former republics of Central Asia, as, indeed, in other regions of the USSR, they managed to sell and resell everything that could be sold. And Viktor Ivanovich was engaged in simple things: he transported cash and some goods, which for the time being it was decided to hide, in order to subsequently transfer them to the exchanges, the foundation of which was somewhat delayed, except for the famous "Alice". But this was the Moscow exchange. easier.

The most interesting thing in Kobanenko's story was that Saddam Hussein, with his military mediocrity, managed to greatly disappoint his Moscow patrons. And those, apparently, have now decided to bet on Tehran. The money is the same, but more sense was foreseen. As for money, it's hard to say, but the sense was already clearly looming in the Transcaucasus, and especially on the border with Afghanistan.

Arriving at the consulate, I immediately telephoned Trokman. It turned out that Bill flew to Paris. I contacted our Paris station and they put me on the phone in Trockmann's car.

In a nutshell, I relayed the news to him, promising to send a more detailed report later.

Trokman reacted somehow sluggishly:

- Iran is still better than Iraq. If this ever presents a problem, it will only be for the Russians themselves. So far, Tehran will only be able to use these missiles as minarets.

"I wish I could be as optimistic as you are, Bill," I sighed.

Trokman sighed in response.

"Mike, I have some business to do in Paris. I hope to deal with them today or tomorrow and, perhaps, I will fly to St. Petersburg for a couple of days. Wait for me there. Then we'll fly away together. I must say that I was very surprised.

Are you officially coming here or incognito?

Bill laughed.

- Incognito - that would be great. But, unfortunately, all the villains in the newspaper comics have my face. Let's just say semi-officially. I am accompanying Luigi Torrelli. He wants to have some fun in St. Petersburg, and the State Department asked for assistance. And at the same time, at his expense, we will solve several of our problems.

Asking me not to get too drunk for the next couple of days, Bill hung up.

Luigi Torrelli is one of the ten richest people in the world, and his arrival here seemed very strange, because for a person of this magnitude, in my opinion, there is nothing to catch here. Evil tongues and our tabloid press claimed that the president himself waited in Mr. Torrelli's waiting room once every two weeks for instructions on foreign and domestic policy, which he must immediately implement. This, of course, is hyperbole, but, to be honest, if I had learned about the forthcoming visit of the President of the United States here, I would have been less surprised.

I left the cipher room and was immediately confronted by the Consul General, who smiled broadly at the sight of me, though his eyes were sadly preoccupied.

"Mike," the general said, "there was a call from City Hall. They very much ask that you attend the banquet today as an official representative of the embassy. Sophie and I will too. I have a few questions for you, Mike. Come to me.

Our relationship with official State Department diplomats has always been somewhat odd at all levels, be it ambassadors, consuls general, or some kind of attaché. Some scandals are always expected from us, as a result of which, as a rule, not us, but they are expelled from the country. Sometimes the contradictions reached such proportions that they had to be resolved in Washington at the level of the top officials of our departments. Sometimes it came to

major scandals in Congress and noisy campaigns against the CIA in all media.

In my work, I always got along peacefully with diplomats and even tried to the best of my ability to fulfill my official duties at the embassy, where I was listed as an assistant cultural attache. I just didn't like being asked unnecessary questions. And only ambassadors and consuls general who have fallen into the sin of their own greatness have the habit of asking unnecessary questions (say, where have I been absent for half a year?).

The Consul General here got on very peacefully with Crump and never mind his own business. I want to point out that the CIA is not the KGB. We are very dependent on the tact and understanding of our tasks by professional diplomats, who, if they so desire, can cause us a lot of trouble, or even disrupt one of our operations. And public opinion will be on their side.

The general took me not to his official office, decorated with a portrait of the president and a large national flag, but to a small drawing room next to him, where he immediately offered me a cigar. This in itself spoke of the fact that the consul went to violate the written etiquette not from a good life. He needs to know something from me. And I was not mistaken.

"Mike," he began cautiously, as if afraid to startle me, "when are you going to the States?"

"The other day," I said, lighting a cigarette. - I actually came to say goodbye to this amazing city in which I had to work a lot. You know that very well, John.

It was evident from the general's eyes that he did not believe a single word of mine, but was very much alarmed by something.

"Mike," he continued, "I understand that you don't have to answer my questions at all. Moreover, I am well aware of all their faux pas. But I represent our country in this city, and I would not want anyone to drop its prestige. Especially now.

— Is that how? I was surprised. "Are you afraid that I will damage the prestige of the United States at the upcoming presentation in the palace by drinking more than usual?" Have you received information from the State Department that I am an alcoholic and a drug addict? Or am I going to rape the mayor's wife?

"You misunderstood me, Mike," the general was embarrassed. - But I received three calls from the mayor's office - two times Mr. Topchak himself, looking for you and reminding me that they were waiting for you at the presentation. Knowing these people, I would like to warn you, Mike. Did you get involved with them in any local scams that will surely lead sooner or later to a criminal investigation. I would not want the traces of this investigation to lead us to the consulate. Do you understand me?

"Absolutely not," I said. "And don't be fooled by me. Because you, John, are worried about something else. But you don't dare to ask me about it. Therefore, you pretend that you are concerned about the impeccable reputation of the consulate.

"If you're right," the general retorted mildly, "it's only half right." It worries me when American diplomats," he bowed in my direction, "arrive unexpectedly from Moscow, and then, together with the mayor of this city and police detachments, inspect the railroad trains with industrial raw materials as their private property, without any hesitation. And then the mayor calls me three times, inviting this diplomat, -

bow again, to yourself with the spontaneity of a business partner. Did you buy those trains, Mike? Or are you acting as an intermediary from some company?

— Aha! I rejoiced. "I didn't think I'd cause you so much trouble, John. If I understood you correctly, then from the moment I arrived in the city you lost peace, because you are sure that I am here only to prepare the arrival of the president of the company on behalf of which I buy echelons of scrap metal? Do you want to know who this is and if there is a place in this business for you?"

From the mouth of the consul, like from the chimney of a destroyer gaining momentum, cigarette smoke poured out, and from behind this smoke screen a distress signal sounded:

— Who's coming to visit us, Mike? The president? Why is your interim boss talking in some obscure allusions in Moscow? I tried to contact the department, but absolutely no one knows anything there. The movement of large figures such as Mr. Torrelli is as difficult to conceal as the movement of an aircraft carrier force. They are followed by special satellites, which, however, cannot always identify them.

"The only thing I can tell you, John," I took pity on the consul, "is that nothing official is coming. And unofficially, anything can happen here. Until the global flood. And you shouldn't be so worried. The scrap metal will sink, but the United States consulate will float up like Noah's Ark and bring all the survivors to Capitol Hill.

The sight of Noah's Ark sailing under the American flag, apparently, finally finished off the consul.

"I don't even want to go to this presentation," he admitted. - I feel that a period of some unpleasant surprises is coming, and excuse me, Mike, I associate these surprises with your arrival.

"You overestimate my value, Joey," I laughed. "We are both middle-ranking civil servants, on whom nothing ever depends. Our business is to carry out the instructions and directives received. The arrival somewhere of such a petty official as me means absolutely nothing, even if the purpose of the visit is to purchase a batch of scrap metal at bargain prices. This will not even affect the exchange price of scrap metal. We are talking about only four echelons, and you are upset as if I bought up all the scrap metal in this country, which is gradually turning into scrap metal.

- And will be bought at the price of scrap metal? the Consul asked with a sigh.

- Does it upset you? I asked.

"But not happy either," he said. - It is enough to look at Latin America to understand that our policy, to put it mildly, is not very well thought out. We are far from ready to become a world monopoly.

"Well, it's still a long way off," I reassured him. "You and I have nothing to worry about. And I do not think that we will turn into some kind of metropolis on the model of the old colonial empires. I firmly believe that we will become perhaps not even the most prosperous state in the United States of the World. But in order to clear the way to this, it is necessary to throw more than one billion cubic miles of shit.

But the consul, apparently, was not very worried about the global fate of mankind. He was much more worried about the rumor that some kind of bigwig was coming from the States to Petersburg, but he didn't know anything about it. After listening to my tirade about the future transformation of the world, he said:

"Nevertheless, Mike, I will be very obliged to you if you do not let our consulate down. I am not talking so much about some of your actions, for which, after all, I am not responsible, but about a visit to the city by one of our very important persons. My ignorance of this may put the entire consulate in a difficult position. We must prepare.

"You always have time to bend over," I thought, but asked out loud whether we were going to a presentation or No.

When the car of the Consul General drove up to the Mariinsky Palace (although for some reason the mayor stubbornly invited me to the Anichkov Palace), it was already quite late. We were late for the start of the celebrations. Outside the palace, behind metal barriers and a police cordon, a picket got wet in the snow and rain, raising home-made paper posters denouncing the mayor, American imperialism and world Zionism. Life went on.

The square was almost unlit, and the equestrian monument to Nicholas I hung over it with the gloomy inexorability of fate.

No sooner had I appeared at the presentation than I found out that all those present were well aware of Signor Torrelli's forthcoming visit to the city. The Consul looked at me reproachfully and stepped aside, clearly demonstrating his dissatisfaction with my useless secrecy. But the mayor himself jumped up to me and, taking my arm, dragged me to the table, at which several people in tailcoats were sitting. I was ready to take a quarter for the first time they got into a tailcoat about three days ago.

Between them sat several ladies in evening dresses adorned with counterfeit jewels from the Dutch firm of Jacob Moritz. And with a bored look, they chewed sandwiches with caviar and some Bavarian sausages. Between the tables and groups of guests scurried about Berkesov's boys with trays laden with glasses.

All this turmoil was started on the occasion of the opening of a joint Russian-American commercial bank with the rather pretentious name "Cosmosbank". On the American side, the bank was represented by Ben Livshitz, a middle-class financier who went to Russia in search of fortune after two bankruptcies in the States.

The bank's Russian co-chairman was former KGB lieutenant general Georgy Burkov, who had once held the post that Colonel Berkesov now holds. I knew Burkov from the old days, when, if my memory serves me right, he borrowed \$50 from me and never returned it. Now he shone like a cruiser ready to take on board the Queen of England. And it was from what! Through the hose, which was sitting right there in the form of Ben Livshits, it was possible to pump anything in both directions. Moreover, everything swayed in one direction - to the West: both goods and money. Why this pleased everyone present so much, it was absolutely incomprehensible to me. But I learned a long time ago that Russia cannot be understood with the mind. And didn't try. We must accept the reality as it is.

"Gentlemen," said the mayor. - I think that you do not need to introduce the person whom you all have known for a long time as an old friend of our country who has done so much for the sake of the victory of our democracy. Your health, dear Mike!

It was only then that I realized that it was about me and that it was I who was the father of Russian democracy. I bowed to those present, looked pityingly into the sad Jewish eyes of Ben Livshitz and sipped a glass of champagne, which was as reminiscent of champagne as I was Snow White from the Walt Disney series. It's nothing you can do! The initial stage of capital accumulation, in which old Marx went crazy, and Ian Allen broke a bottle of Madeira on the head of his beloved dog.

Everyone at the table looked at me with some interest, and the ladies even stopped chewing.

"Dear Mike," the mayor went on, lowering his voice. "We know that you will be one of Mr. Torrelli's main advisers during his stay in our city and wherever he wants to go next. If you want, of course. There is nothing better than Petersburg in our country. So can you help me and Mr. Torrelli solve some of our problems? For him, this will not be difficult, and, of course, we will thank you royally, Mike.

General Burkov, looking at me from under his shaggy brows, majestically nodded his head, apparently confirming the fact that they would thank me royally.

— What are your problems? I asked. "What do you want from good old Luigi?"

Topchak laughed:

- What do we need? Money, of course. What else!

- And more? I asked.

"Yes, not so much," General Burkov explained. - Two or three billion.

- Rubles? I asked, although the answer was obvious.

Topchak made a contemptuous face, apparently expressing his attitude towards the national Russian currency, and General Burkov honestly said:

— Dollars, of course.

"Well, you guys have appetites," I said. - The president loses a bucket of blood and several years of his life in order to knock out some 40-50 million from Congress to help the poor in your country, and always receives, at best, a fifth of this amount.

And you - take out and put in two or three billion, no more, no less.

"Mike," Topchak whispered with fury in his voice, "you completely misunderstood me. We are not asking for charity at all. Here listen...

Taking the glasses, we went into a small niche, where there was a cozy-looking table, over which hung an old bronze scone depicting a half-naked girl, wrapped in garlands of leaves, with a lamp in her raised hand. Catching my eye. Treadmill
said:

- This is a brand new one. Everything old has long been stolen. Down to the doorknobs. And this one will soon be stolen due to the rush demand for non-ferrous metals.

I remembered the trains with non-ferrous metal, against the background of which Topchak threw a scandal to Colonel Berkesov, and thought that owning the trains, there was no need to unscrew the door handles.

"In this palace," the mayor continued, not without pride, "I have specific people who are personally responsible for every doorknob, for every ...

General Burkov coughed, thus interrupting the mayor's report on the work done.

"Yes," he laughed, "this is for you, Mike, I'm probably equally wild to listen, and

not interested. Let's sit down and talk about really important things. You know very well, Mike, that St. Petersburg was, and still is, primarily a city of shipbuilders. We have powerful shipbuilding plants here, which have no analogues in the world, scientific centers and design offices. And we built good ships, - the MZR continued not so confidently, seeking support from General Burkov.

He nodded majestically again and added:

- Very nice ships. I would even say that they were better than yours, Mike. Remember how your naval attache choked with saliva when we arranged for him a boat trip past the completed berths of our factories. We then arrested several people in St. Petersburg who wanted to sell him photographs of our newest ships.

To be honest, I didn't remember anything like that. Our naval attache only salivated once, when he found out that one of his assistants had been recruited by the KGB and had set up a whole spy ring in Norfolk. In the end, the Soviets got one of our fleet's operational ciphers, but destroyed their entire residency at Norfolk and Newport News. There was little sense from the captured cipher, since they managed to create a system of electronic decryption with sin in half only a year later. It turned out to be so bulky that it did not fit even on cruisers that wanted to adapt it. As a result, a whole building under the GRU was allocated for this system, and a very interesting picture turned out. The ships of the high seas sent our intercepted radio messages to Moscow for decoding, but almost never received a response. The intercepted and deciphered dispatches of our ships, decorated with Soviet stamps "Top Secret!" In terms of obtaining information, Soviet intelligence occupied, it seems to me, the absolute first place in the world, but in terms of its processing and use, it lagged somewhere in the very last place.

But since Burkov claims that they rode our naval attache on a boat, I did not object. Rolled - so rolled. Just wondering what I have to do with all this?

"The fact is, Mike," the mayor continued, moving closer to me and with all his appearance reminiscent of a conspirator from the times of the Venetian Republic, "now there is an almost completed nuclear cruiser near the wall of the Baltic Shipyard. Former "Yuri Andropov". Now we have renamed it "Peter the Great". We need to fix it. Otherwise, our factories will collapse. Finish building this ship and get money for another one. These are your ships, Mike. For your sake, the construction began. You can't leave this thing like that.

An indignant expression appeared on the face of the mayor, which happens to everyone who is faced with the immeasurable meanness of a person.

I laughed as I knew the story very well. For fifty years now our country has reigned supreme on the sea, and therefore dominated the world. In the middle of the last century, three books appeared, perceived by contemporaries as the Bible. Two of them were written in Europe, and one - here in America. The first - the famous "Capital" by Marx and "Evolution of Species" by Darwin, as time has shown, turned out to be false. The third book, known to a much smaller number of people because of its rather narrow specialization, turned out to be absolutely correct. She was noticed and appreciated by many.

This third book was written by American Admiral Alfred Mahan and it was called "Domination of the Sea". The admiral clearly and logically proved that he who owns the ocean owns the world. And precisely because of the fact that two-thirds of our small planet is occupied by the ocean. In other words, to master the world, you must first master the ocean.

In principle, the admiral did not say anything new, unlike Marx and Darwin. implicitly

this was understood by the ancients. At the time of the publication of the book, England owned the ocean, therefore claiming dominion over the world. The book of Admiral Mahan, for the first time clothed the old, it would seem, truth in a coherent scientific form, deprived many of them of rest. The book was carefully studied by Kaiser Wilhelm, who then challenged the naval power of the British. The most intelligent of all Russian emperors, Nicholas II, read the book in the most attentive way, after which he allocated an additional 90 million gold rubles for the development of the fleet. The book was read by Churchill, Stalin and Hitler, but they were all in a hurry. Mastering the ocean is not easy. We need maritime traditions and countless billions of dollars, we need a well-thought-out policy and the initiative attractiveness of a political idea, not to mention the fact that we need a healthy and advanced economy.

In general, the path is as difficult as Nietzsche's from man to superman: along a hairy bridge over an abyss, where one can fall every second. As it happened with the Russians in Tsushima, with the British in the Battle of Jutland, with the Germans in Scapa Flow. And it almost happened to us during the Great Depression. It is equally dangerous both in wartime and in peacetime. Peaceful is even more dangerous. Having no rival, the fleet begins to degrade, if only because it is constantly cut off from appropriations, destroying naval programs and development prospects. Therefore, the fleet must necessarily have an opponent, and if it does not exist, then create it.

Having seized absolute dominance over the world's oceans in the fierce naval battles of World War II, having thrown all our enemies and allies off their pedestals, we had to take care to maintain this dominance as long as possible, and, if possible, forever.

After the death of Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union showed a clear unwillingness to participate in the naval arms race that we desperately tried to impose on it. Moreover, in the country, on the orders of the unforgettable Nikita Khrushchev, they simply began to destroy their own fleet, relying on the intercontinental missiles that appeared. Our fleet is under mortal danger. One after another, congressional commissions were wrapping up projects for the development of our naval forces. It is enough to look at the numbering of our attack aircraft carriers, where number 59 immediately follows the number 48 to understand how many ships were slaughtered in those years. It can be said that Khrushchev's policy was very clever. Knowing perfectly well that he would inevitably lose the naval race, he was no less well aware that without building his own fleet, he would eventually destroy ours. Fortunately, especially for us, Khrushchev did not stay in power for long. During this time, having spent a certain amount of effort and dollars, we managed to convince his successors to launch in Russia a military shipbuilding program unprecedented since the 19th century with the motivation to repel an attack from our submarine missile carriers, armed at that time with Polaris missiles. It was a good diversion. The Soviets began to feverishly build a fleet that was basically anti-submarine, that is, posed absolutely no threat to our dominance at sea. In fact, if it came to the action of strategic submarine missile carriers, then no one would ever need any fleets again.

Meanwhile, under the Soviet threat at sea, money poured into the full-flowing Mississippi for our fleet. A program was implemented to create unprecedented nuclear escort cruisers in the world. Indeed, who needs nuclear aircraft carriers if they have non-nuclear escort? But then our congress, as it often happens, reared up. Nuclear cruisers are already too much. Hasn't the fleet eaten too much of the taxpayer's money lately? He received his nuclear aircraft carriers. Now he wants nuclear cruisers. What does he want tomorrow? Nuclear boats for admirals?

There are times in Congress when no logic can influence its decision. It remains only to play on the instinct of self-preservation. We didn't have any

way out, how to provoke the Soviets to rebuild their own nuclear cruisers. For the USSR, such construction was completely pointless, since they did not have nuclear aircraft carriers at all, and launching nuclear cruisers into the sea, accompanied by oil-fired destroyers, was ridiculous to the point of a joke. But, fortunately, the USSR did not have any opinion of its own, including the scandalous independent parliament that controlled the financial policy of the government. However, by and large there was no government, but there was a gang of greedy, stupid and criminal elders who considered the gigantic country as their private property.

I do not want to go into unnecessary details here, but I will say that having spent a total of about two million dollars, we managed to get the Soviet fleet to order a whole series of nuclear cruisers for industry. Even at the design stage, we, that is, the CIA, allegedly obtained information about this, which we laid out in front of the stunned congressmen. To doubt that the Russians planned to build nuclear cruisers, the information provided did not allow. But we were asked to explain why Moscow agreed to such an expensive program and how it is going to use these cruisers. Here we, frankly, had to sweat to come up with something plausible. We explained to the congressmen that the Russians are going to build nuclear aircraft carriers in the future, but since they are smarter and more cunning than us, they start with escort ships. They have such a tradition. In the old days, they built escort ships for battleships of the "Soviet Union" type. The escorts were built, but the battleships themselves were not. The war got in the way. Then they began to build cruisers of the "Sverdlov" type to accompany some conceived giants, it seems, of the "Stalingrad" type. The cruisers were built, the giants did not have time. Khrushchev interfered. Now, probably, something will interfere too. But they start again with escort ships.

In other words, before buying a horse, a saddle and bridle are bought. It's a matter of taste. Some do the opposite. The fact remains that the Soviets conceived the construction of nuclear aircraft carriers. We must be ready to meet this challenge. The Soviets will have nuclear aircraft carriers with nuclear cruisers. And we have? Congress surrendered in shock.

While he was in shock, the fleet managed to build 6 nuclear cruisers, delicately disguising them as frigates. Nuclear aircraft carriers received nuclear escort. But the Russians did not let us down either. During this time, they commissioned three nuclear cruisers and began construction of a fourth. Only three. Yes, but what! If ours were a little more than 10 thousand tons of displacement, then each of the Russians was almost three times larger and a good fifty meters longer. It was extremely difficult to drag such a ship through the military-industrial department of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

The Ministers of Defense of the USSR were traditionally combined-arms marshals and always treated naval claims with suspicion and caution, saving stock steel for other resources for the army.

But this was also done, justifying such a task for these ships as the destruction of our aircraft carriers at sea. Huge, oversaturated with weapons, with primitive electronics, deprived of air cover, they would never have coped with this task, but theoretically it was possible to prove its implementation. In the ranks, these mastodons behaved disgustingly. Incorrectly calculated hulls broke on the ocean wave, reactors "flowed", gearboxes flew, space telepointers that practiced the range of approach to aircraft carriers (if they were detected) at an effective salvo distance did not work. In their bases, they had neither docks nor moorings, but they honestly continued to build them. The empire collapsed without completing the fourth ship. It's a thing of the past, for them, as well as for the first Soviet aircraft carriers built in parallel, there was always not enough money and, believe it or not, about a third of them were always financed by us.

Now it's just ridiculous to remember. It turns out that the factories have nothing to do but complete the construction of the fourth giant. No matter how hard we tried, someone in Moscow still had the sense to understand the complete uselessness of these ships, and a new, more practical project with the code name, it seems, Anchar, was already ready, but its construction could not be started. Everything collapsed.

I sighed at the flood of memories. All the same, we have done a good job during these three decades, preventing the monster called the Soviet Union from growing real fangs with which it could tear all of humanity apart.

Many reconnaissance sketches from the so-called "cold war" are made at the level of the highest and most delicate works of art. How much skill and energy it took, for example, to drive the communist monster into the Afghan mountains, where it ultimately found its grave. This, in turn, made it possible to pit Iraq against Iran in a seven-year war and inflict a series of final mortal blows on the Soviet Union.

Few people know, and even fewer will know about it in the future, what would have happened to the world if all these operations had failed. Back in 1978, a plan was developed in Moscow to seize Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates of the Persian Gulf by Iraq.

Everything had to happen quickly - in two or three weeks. I don't know if this would lead to the Third World War, but I can say for sure that in this case the United States would be put in an exceptionally difficult position, since there would be nowhere to land troops (except in Israel), and the Soviet fleet, if and was not yet in a position to defeat us, he could very effectively block all our operations in the Persian Gulf and cut off the Mediterranean from the Indian Ocean. Hundreds of people took part in all these operations, who, often not knowing each other, nevertheless clearly coordinated their plans and actions, sparing neither themselves nor others in the name of a goal that seemed very important at that time - saving the world from red despotism.

I am glad and proud to be among these people who crushed the red monster. I don't know what will grow on its ruins. The Soviet Union grew up on the ruins of the Russian Empire. I personally do not expect anything good from what will grow on the ruins of the Soviet Union. Maybe something even worse. But for now, for the foreseeable future, the world may take a breather. And that's good. And then it turns out: in Russia again there is nothing to do but complete the construction of nuclear cruisers.

"Guys," I asked Topchak and Burkov, "why do you need this cruiser?" What are you going to do with it then? Sink our aircraft carriers? Or turn it into a floating supermarket, painting it like Khokhloma?

"Mike," Topchak said, trying to be calm. We appreciate your American humor. I find it excellent. But it seems to be in your interest to prevent social explosions in this country. If we, here in St. Petersburg, throw shipyard workers out into the street, close a dozen and a half research institutes and specialized design bureaus, then you can imagine what will happen in a city that has lived and fed for centuries on the creation of warships.

- My God! I was surprised. "But can't they be forced to do something socially useful?" Are they really taught to make only weapons, and, for the most part, already outdated or useless to anyone? Turn around guys! Find an order for the construction of container ships, tankers, something else. You will get it much cheaper than, say, in the same Sweden or Finland. But we must move, look for orders, negotiate, and not sit in our offices, picking our noses.

"That's all right," agreed the mayor. And we are all working in this direction. But this ship is almost completed. If we start to cut him, then this may cause an outburst of indignation on the part of the patriots, and we cannot ignore this. It is necessary to rake up the post-imperial rubble somehow.

"Well, okay," I sighed. "I will talk to the interested people who are funding your conversion. All funding for the time being is being poured into the completion of those monsters that your military-industrial complex could not cope with during the Soviet Union. But in any case, you will not need the amount you are asking for. It seems to me that for the completion of the cruiser, at most, 20 million dollars are needed and the same amount later for cutting it. Scrap metal can be sold for around \$40 million. So everyone will remain with their plus or minus a couple of million. And you, if I heard right, ask for 3 billion. Are you going to lay down the fifth cruiser?"

Of course, this cruiser will have to be completed at our expense. It is now more profitable for us than for the Russians. But the point, of course, is not in this cruiser. It's not as important as I'm led to believe. And it was not at all for the sake of the cruiser that I was dragged into this cozy niche. These guys bought real estate in the West, and now they are entangled in local taxes and penalties for maintaining real estate, and therefore they are trying to extract more cash from us, threatening social explosions and other cataclysms.

Since no one answered my last question: are they going to build a fifth ship, I summed up the discussion:

- OK. I think that we will agree with this ship. Let's finish building. And it will be wonderful if you find a buyer for it. It would be very useful to some of your friends in Beijing or Tehran, Baghdad cannot pull such a ship. And the Chinese, I heard, are already scouring all your fleets, even asking the price of aircraft carriers? Work, lads, for the great United States Navy.

I thought they would thank me and leave me alone. But nothing happened, because they needed the cruiser only to start a conversation, which they always like to start with some highly state topic. It is hard to think of anything better than a nuclear cruiser with a displacement of almost 30,000 tons.

So, while I was proudly hovering in unthinkably high spheres, where only issues related to nuclear cruisers are discussed, and was very pleased with myself, I was rather rudely smacked on the sinful earth, betraying the true reason for my stay in a niche.

The hitherto silent General Burkov spoke up.

"Mike," he asked slowly, choosing his words, "why are the trainloads of export metal being delayed?" What's happened?

"General," I replied. — It seems to me that it is better for you to ask this question to your former subordinate Colonel Berkesov.

"Of course, I will ask Berkesov this question," Burkov shot me a look from under his shaggy eyebrows. But in this case he will refer to you. Therefore, it is better to start with you. You know very well that these are not the first echelons of this kind. And there were no problems before. What happened this time?

What could I answer him? To say that his former colleagues fooled me with the simplicity of thimble-makers. We wanted to seize the missiles, which, according to our information, were intended for Saddam Hussein, and they slipped us scrap metal, sending the missiles to Tehran?

I not only never had anything against the export of raw materials from Russia, but I myself contributed to this and even earned something from it. I forgot to think about these echelons, considering that after the check that we carried out, they would go further to their destination: to a commercial port or through the Baltic states. I don't know.

Seeing sincere bewilderment on my face, Burkov, continuing to drill me with his professional gaze, almost growled:

Just don't pretend you don't know anything about it. Berkesov placed guards around these echelons and did not let anyone near them. Why?

"Ask Berkesov," I began to get angry. "I have no idea why he delayed those trains. He is not accountable to me for his actions. Nor do I intend to answer to you, General. But I repeat, I have nothing to do with this.

"You have nothing to do with it," Burkov growled. Everyone is happy to receive commissions. And who will pay penalties for idle transport and disruption of supplies. Or...

The mayor interrupted the general's eloquence with a gesture of his hand.

"Gentlemen," he said. - No need to aggravate the relationship. I think Mr. Torrelli's arrival will clear everything up. Our dear Mike will simply remember to remind him that we need three billion dollars. After all, it's easy, isn't it? Topchak smiled one of his charming smiles. - And we will settle the issue with the echelons. And we will compensate all parties for the losses incurred. Is it true, Mike?

The smile still shone on his face, but his eyes did not laugh.

- So we agreed, Mike?

- About what?

About three billion dollars! Two pairs of hard eyes stared at me like revolver barrels.

- For the completion of the cruiser? I chuckled.

- And much more. On a number of social programs related to our city and region.

"And taxes," I said.

We must give him his due. He did not blink an eye, but only smiled again: the civilization of a person and citizen is determined precisely by the timely and honest payment of taxes. Honest and decent people, in addition, still pay commissions to intermediaries. Let's say 10% - \$300 million!

"That's a lot more than each of us will get," Topchak guessed my thoughts. - And for Mr. Torrelli, this is a penny. So how is it, Mike?

"Interesting," I said. - And how do you intend to get them? In the form of a loan? Do not interrupt ... I meant a loan that will have to be given to others or start a cold war. Or will you offer something for this money? Or do you just want to receive in the form of gratuitous assistance? What should I say to old Luigi?

"We're not begging," Burkov said angrily. - We have something to offer Mr. Torrelli for this money.

"Then why do you need me?" Arrange another presentation in honor of him and sell everything that he buys, including the cruiser. Why would you waste 300 million on this business?

Both looked at each other, and then stared at me, as if I were the last idiot who does not understand elementary things.

"Without your request, Mike," the mayor switched to "you" with me, "Mr. Torrelli will not only not talk to us about business, but he will not even receive us.

- My request? I laughed. "It's not worth a cent in Mr. Torrelli's eyes. I assure you, I am not at all sure that I will see him at all, except perhaps when opening the door of his car. And it is doubtful that anyone would entrust me with such work ...

"Don't be modest, Mike," Topchak patted me on the shoulder. "We know very well who you are and what you are worth. Don't be modest.

- "What am I standing for"? I asked. "Believe me, Mr. Mayor, I stand very little. I am a petty government official with a salary of less than \$80,000 a year. And for some reason you think that I manage some global processes or can somehow influence them. In terms of the rank of my position, I am much lower than you, Mr. Mayor, and, of course, you, General.

- And what is this position? Topchak leaned back in his chair, squinting his eyes, crossing his arms over his chest.

"You know her well," I allowed myself to sip my glass. "I'm an assistant cultural attache at the American embassy. I can show you the documents if you don't believe me.

Burkov bit his lips, while Topchak, on the contrary, laughed merrily:

- So, it was the assistant of some attache there, a petty official who receives God knows what kind of salary, who manages nothing and knows nothing, took and destroyed the superpower of the Soviet Union!

— I destroyed the Soviet Union? - then it was my turn to laugh heartily. - Yes, you just went crazy, dear Topchak. Not to mention the fact that no one destroyed the USSR - he died a natural death from blood cancer and intestinal volvulus. Neither I, nor, in general, nor we Americans are to blame for this. Those who have been feeding your country with human corpses and rusty iron tanks are to blame for almost three-quarters of a century. And by the way, it continues to do so. And if we saw fatal symptoms on the patient's ruddy face before others and took measures so that he died quietly and did not blow up the house in which we all live before his death, then this cannot be blamed on us. Rather, on the contrary.

Both darkened.

"All right, all right," the mayor muttered conciliatorily. "We've heard of your dealings, Mike. How did you operate here with Andropov. They told me in Moscow.

- If you want to listen to all sorts of gossip and fables, - I shrugged my shoulders, - then this is your business. However..." I moved closer to the mayor. - By the way, about you, dear Topchak, there is also a lot of gossip. How did you, together with the former secretary of the regional committee Vidasov and his manager Prutnkhin - they both sit at that table, you can call them to refute this gossip - bought land, hotels and everything else in a dozen different countries from Switzerland to Argentina is still sucking the last juices out of this city in order to pay taxes on such huge real estate that even medieval margraves and robber barons could not dream of. There are also various gossips about your banking operations, about various joint ventures and even about

Vyborg highway, along which you, my friend, along with your worthy predecessor Shodorev, drive contraband, including drugs, in a stream. And keep for the protection of this channel various thugs left without work from the Baltic countries. So let's not listen to gossip. It is better, indeed, to complete the cruiser. And I'll talk to Señor Torrelli if the opportunity arises.

The presentation was very noisy and pompous. There were some singers and reciters, electric guitars and drums of some shaggy unkempt rock bands roaring. Someone was dancing, someone was fulfilling their only task - to drink themselves unconscious for free.

Slipping out of the niche, I took a sip of whiskey and decided to take a quiet, English bow, get to the former Anna Ulyanova Street and get some rest. There was absolutely nothing for me to do here. The vast majority of those present were various crooked entrepreneurs who hoped to make useful contacts here or slip a bribe into someone on the sly, for it was completely unthinkable to be an entrepreneur in Russia now and not be a crook. The level of crime depended on the scale of the activity. Since the entrepreneurs did not produce anything, but only resold, that is, they were engaged in intermediary activity in a spiral without any participation of the producer of the goods, this spiral, swirling steeply upwards, scattered the last remnants of the national economy and national independence there to the wind. For they are twins, one might even say Siamese twins.

I didn't need anyone here, and, fortunately, nobody needed me either, because not everyone was privy to the state secrets that Topchak and Burkov knew about. Although everyone knew about the upcoming arrival of Torrelli and were very excited about this. It was as if Señor Luigi was about to drive along the Nevsky in an open carriage, throwing wads of dollars around.

Such situations are especially common in Russian folk tales, although gold and silver coins appear instead of dollars. That is, thalers - "efimki" - the progenitors of the dollar. In other words, we can conclude that the Russian people have lived for centuries with a bright dream of a dollar. But got the Bolshevik regime. Very unfair. And now his dream is starting to come true. In a democracy, although it is already clear to a fool that there has never been any democracy in this country and never will be. Democracy is understood here only as complete lawlessness and the right to act at one's own discretion, regardless of anyone or anything. For some reason, everyone in this country does not like each other. To put it mildly, they don't like it. Sometimes I feel like they just hate me. Russian psychology is strange.

If in the West someone begins to grow, whether in business, in art or in the field of social activity, then he serves as an example for others who strive to rise to his level and work tirelessly for this. The life and methods of this man are studied, even if they were not always impeccable, both from the point of view of morality and legality. But the one who goes up drags the rest with him. In Russia, anyone going up causes only anger and envy. But even that would be half the trouble. And the trouble is that no one seeks after him. On the contrary, titanic efforts are being made to throw him down again, into the dirt, into nothingness. And not to take his place. Far from it. And just so that he does not stick out, but sits in the general shit. Therefore, eternal problems arise here, unknown to the rest of the world.

Thinking in this way, and angry at myself for the acrimoniousness of my own thoughts, I made my way between banquet tables, dancing couples, and curtains of tobacco smoke, in the hope that the Consul General's chauffeur would take me to Crump's apartment. The general himself was talking with Topchak about something with importance. The mayor, helping himself with a very imaginative gesture,

something fervently proved to John, and he, like a trained elephant, nodded his head.

But it was not so easy to escape unnoticed.

When I solemnly, like a royal galley, sailed past the table at which sat the former first secretary of the regional committee, Benya Vidasov, his manager, former members of the bureau of the regional committee and several former district committee secretaries - now bankers and presidents of various firms, Vidasov himself, who knew me from Gorbachev times, got up from the table and, smiling like a well-fed cobra, addressed me in English:

— Dear Mike, how glad I am to see you in our city.

“Your pronunciation has improved significantly over the past two years,” I complimented him, trying to get around.

A series of serpentine smiles played across his intelligent face. He took my sleeve and, taking my tone, answered:

You have to study, Mike. There, in the States, you have such crooks that without a good knowledge of the language, even your immortal soul will be stolen from you, writing it down as interest on the forfeit somewhere on the 55th page of the contract.

His entire gang followed me with wary eyes, as if expecting me to grab a Thompson submachine gun from under the jacket and shoot every single one. The idea of the Thompson submachine gun came to my mind, because they all remarkably resembled our mafiosi of the 30s, when this machine was especially popular. But ours made money by importing alcohol into the States during the idiotic Prohibition. And these people were exporting oil and natural gas from Russia in a stream, leaving huge money in accounts in Western banks and preparing to run there after their predecessors from the first echelon of the party nomenclature. They even sent their accomplice Pizhu to the government, a former member of the bureau of the regional committee and director of a large complex of military factories. Once in the government, he developed such a stormy and frank activity that even the sleepy Moscow prosecutor's office was forced to make a presentation to the president of a relative one of his closest aides. The President drove Pizhu out of office, which, however, he did not really need.

However, while holding the position of Deputy Prime Minister, he managed to distinguish himself by trying to extinguish another interethnic conflict in the south in the old Bolshevik way (he did not know any other), ordering the population of several Ingush villages to be shot without exception during the Ingush-Ossetian conflict. This scandal, which the Russian government hushed up as best it could, did not in the least affect the flows of Tyumen oil and gas that this company pumped out of the dying country.

I would just be happy. All their actions were aimed at increasing the power of my country and strengthening its dominant position in the world. To some extent, I was even their accomplice, but I could not help myself - I was overwhelmed by some kind of contempt for these people and a misunderstanding of their motives. Although there was nothing to understand. The motive was the dollar and the position in the world that the dollar provided. Knowledgeable people have assured me that the feelings that come over me when dealing with these people are not at all contempt or latent condemnation of their actions. This is the usual feeling of a colonial official in his communication with representatives of the native authorities. It is difficult to define it; entire generations of the British, Dutch and Portuguese have been ill with it. Years would pass, I was assured, and the local authorities would speak English in exactly the same way as Spanish is spoken in all countries (except Brazil) from the southern border of the United States to Cape Gori. This is what it means to understand the meaning of the fleet before others! In the same way, as it is already impossible to get rid of the English orders and traditions in India by any means. But all of it was in the past.

And now, having taken over from the hard-working old colonial empires, with the help of the dollar and the English language that dominated the planet, with the support of our global fleet, we are completing the work, bringing the dollar and the English language to the last enclave of barbarism - to Russia.

In theory, everything went smoothly, but in practice, I couldn't believe that Russia would ever be able to describe it like Argentina, or British like a good half of the world. It may somehow be possible to Americanize it at the level of the time of the development of the Far West, and even then it is doubtful. The main task that I saw for the near future was to ensure that this country would never again threaten peace and foment wars, from which it itself suffered the most, but at the same time received some kind of masochistic pleasure. Bismarck's dictum about the "frivolous militancy of aged empires" does not explain anything here. Everything is much more complicated...

Meanwhile Vidas pov let go of my sleeve and grabbed the button of my jacket. I got the impression that he wasn't going to let go of that button for the rest of his life.

"Mike," he continued in the voice of a professional conspirator. "Do you know why Mr. Torrelli comes here?" Can't you get him to accept me and listen to some very lucrative offers? We know that you arrived in our city from Moscow specifically to meet him.

The button of my jacket was crackling and spinning in all directions. I gave him a friendly hug around the shoulders, forcing him to let go of my long-suffering button.

"My friend," I said in Russian. "See that sad-eyed Jewish gentleman over there. This is Venya Livshits. He washed glasses for three years in one of Mr. Torrelli's bars. Talk to him. He knows everything about Torrelli and, for no more than \$50, will give you the information you need.

"I can pay even more," Vidas pov announced smugly, but looked at his namesake Venya, co-president General Burkov, without any admiration.

- And next to Venya, - I continued to explain, - there is that stern gentleman who was the head of the local KGB when you held the post of first secretary of the Leningrad regional committee of the CPSU. But I'm willing to assume that you didn't know each other. You once announced publicly that you never had any dealings with the KGB. Well, this stern gentleman was tested for the right to hold middle management positions in Mr. Torrelli's banking system just at the time when you did not want to do anything with him. Now he is co-president of the bank, and you, if I am not mistaken, are just some kind of consultant ...

Vidas pov abruptly pulled away from me, making it clear that I offended him.

"If you want to know," he said, raising his voice slightly, "I, for your information, I am...

"Well, that's enough," I laughed. - Do not be offended. I know that you are almost an academic. Don't take my words to heart. I'll tell you a secret that Mr. Torrelli owns about thirty thousand such banks as the one at whose presentation we are present. In fact, these are not even banks, but cash points that Mr. Torrelli needs solely to evade federal taxes. In America, these points are served exclusively by Italians, who, at the whim of Mr. Torrelli, should not even have a secondary education. In your country, according to Mr. Torrelli, such work can only be entrusted to KGB generals in the hope that the new KGB will not confiscate anything from their former colleagues. Although you were not a KGB general, I am ready to intercede with Mr. Torrelli to appoint you

co-president of some other bank. Let's say somewhere in Haifa.

- Do you think I'm a Jew? Vidasov's eyes turned into narrow slits. He was only half Jewish, but he carefully concealed this.

"No," I admitted. - Of course not. You don't look like a real Jew. It's just that in Haifa, Mr. Torrelli pays his employees extra for being harmful. War, terrorists - all this gets on the nerves of peaceful bank employees.

His eyes looked at me warily, though a smile continued to snake on his lips. All these people, nominated to the highest party positions by Gorbachev, although they passed through the filter of our checks, remained a mystery both by and large and in detail. For example, we strongly suspected that Vidasov had long been recruited by Israeli intelligence, although, as always happens when dealing with Israeli intelligence, we had no evidence. Direct evidence. But there were plenty of indirect ones. These are the frequent secret visits of Vasily Dmitriev to Smolny when Vidasov was the first secretary, after which, under the patronage of Vidasov, a whole dozen anti-Semitic legal and semi-legal organizations arose in the city. These are the whole mountains of anti-Semitic and fascist literature, which was printed on someone's money by the printing house of the regional committee of the CPSU. This is also a strange policy of the regional committee, connected with Jewish emigration from the city. And much more.

Did Vidasov know who Vasily Dmitriev really was? Most likely no. I am convinced not. But we also had more depressing information. Veniamin Vidasov was not a professional party fool. He was a scientific physicist and at one time headed a large research center engaged in the development of explosives and chemical warfare agents. Over the past few years, we have begun to receive reports that the Israelis at a secret test site in the Negev desert have conducted a series of tests of explosives, exceptional for non-nuclear weapons, in terms of the cubic inch of substance. In terms of parameters, this substance almost coincided with similar tests conducted at the test site near Ufa. The same data were received about chemical warfare agents that appeared at the disposal of the Israeli army, although Israel did not conduct any developments in this area.

The fact that all this goes through Dmitriev, that is, Itzhak Ben-Zvi, I had no doubt. But is Vidasov one of his channels? It's hard to figure it out, especially now. Dmitriev, in his black shirt, hung with crosses and belts, is a secret idol not only of former party secretaries and many powerful barons from the military-industrial complex, but also has a huge number of fans in countries that oppose Israel. All the representatives of various factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the overt and covert agents of Saddam Hussein, Colonel Gaddafi, Assad, and various pro-Iraqi, pro-Iranian and Libyan groups simply pray to him. Dmitriev goes to some powerful baron of the military-industrial complex and says that, say, the Abdallah organization needs explosives of exceptional strength to fight world Zionism. And he gets this explosive, which goes straight to Israel. Well, maybe the extremists will get something to blow up another bank somewhere in Beirut. That's when information comes in that Soviet mines explode right after they are unpacked in the hands of terrorists. This is how it should work! Although we are not at all happy about it.

Israeli intelligence is getting out of hand more and more and has already caused a lot of trouble. You have to keep your ears open. I never forgot for a moment that Yitzhak was in the city and, it seems, also came to hunt Coyote. Will Crump be able to organize our meeting?

"All right, Benya," I said, giving Vidasov a friendly slap on the back. - I'm kidding. I think that

Senor Luigi would like to meet with all the big business people of St. Petersburg. And I will definitely tell him that you are one of them.

Vidas pov's watchful eyes flashed with joy:

"Thanks, Mike," he said, holding out his hand to me. We only need a small investment. After all, we are all doing the same thing.

"Yes," I thought, "but we have different goals." But he said: "Of course!" and, slapping him once more on the back, swam on.

I managed to get out of the main front hall into the adjoining one, where there were also banquet tables, but everything was simpler and the atmosphere was less tense. Here Topchak, like a sovereign duke, collected every little thing, such as representatives of the intelligentsia (excuse the expression), representatives of free professions and other public who loved to drink, eat and chat at the municipal expense. It was not at all easy to get here, and many of those present considered it a great honor for themselves. In turn, the mayor hoped that he would be sung for this in odes and poems, as well as immortalized on canvas and in marble. At the end of the hall there was a door, from where it was already possible to get to the stairs and escape. It was this door that I looked at as I passed the tables, and that's why I jumped when I heard the cry of "Jerry!"

As I said, my full name is Gerald Michael, but since childhood, my mother called me "Mike", that is, my middle name. Only one person called me "Jerry", at least here in St. Petersburg, and that person was the artist Tolya Zaikin. And, of course, it was him: small, mustachioed, almost unchanged in the years that had passed since my tour of work in the Leningrad consulate ended.

Then I visited Zaikin's studio quite often and even bought a couple of his paintings to support him. He regularly went to receptions arranged by us, and by the French, and by the Italians. The KGB then literally dug the ground around Zaikin, surrounding him from all sides. The culmination of this struggle between the KGB and Zaikin was the sending of the poor artist to the army. Believe it or not, in 1980 an artist of European renown was shaved into a soldier, like Taras Shevchenko during the time of Nicholas I. I can confirm this under oath.

"Jerry," smiling drunkenly and opening his arms, Zaikin walked straight at me.

We hugged. He stood on tiptoe and kissed me on the cheek. I wanted to get rid of him quickly, but glancing over the table, from behind which Zaikin crawled out, I saw Chris Crump there, sitting in the company of some hairy-bearded creatures and shaggy girls. Everyone, including Chris, was very on edge.

"Listen, Jerry," Zaikin yelled to almost the entire hall. "It's just brilliant that I met you. I have a new workshop now. Do you know that Michael Jackson himself bought the painting from me? Be sure to come to me.

Saying all this, Zaikin pulled me to the table, and I must admit that I resisted weakly.

"Pour vodka for everyone," Zaikin ordered. "And let's drink to my old friend Jerry." Jerry, do you remember my old workshop? Do you remember my birthday in 1979?

"Tolya," I said, sitting down at the table. "I am very pleased to see that you are alive, healthy and prosperous. I also remember the story of the last nail well.

- Oh, I, I, yavol! Zaikii shouted in German. — The last nail in the coffin of the socialist regime!

Everyone around us roared and reached out to clink glasses with us.

Chris knew the service, and therefore did not react in any way to my appearance. I myself asked her in English where her husband was.

"He didn't go," Chris replied, "citing a bunch of things to do."

She leaned towards me and said softly, "Are you aware that the boss is coming?"

I nodded and asked in Russian, circling the table with my hand:

Are these your friends, Chris?

"Oh, yes," Chris said proudly. "These are all my friends. Artists, poets, writers and publicists. All of them, like flowers on asphalt, grew in the last years of the Bolshevik regime and grew stronger in the fight against the KGB.

"Oh," I said, "these are iron fighters. Tolya," I turned to Zaikin. You are a veteran of the secret war!

"In kind," Zaikin laughed drunkenly. "It was we who punched the first hole in the wall of totalitarianism and took on all the fire. Am I right, Jerry?"

"The truth," I agreed.

The KGB obviously and in the dark tried to use all these "nonconformists" against us, imposing their primitive games on us. But we turned this game into our own direction, making it deadly. But, as they say, let these people die with the knowledge of their duty done. What are some bulldozer exhibitions worth! No one will ever know what they were organized for. I personally do not intend to write any memoirs, and Andropov is already in the next world.

- You are an American? asked a bearded man sitting opposite me with intelligent, lively eyes.

"I am a Papuan," I replied, feeling that I was getting drunk.

"Meet me," Chris said. — He is a very well-known historian and publicist now. His name is Jacob. And I can't remember my last name.

"You can just Yasha," the bearded man smiled.

"I'm just Jerry," I introduced myself. I love historians very much. I almost did not become one myself, but I could not overcome Latin in any way.

Why does a historian need Latin? Yasha was surprised.

- In fact - why? I agreed. "Convince the Yale professors of this. I will be very grateful to you.

Zaikin was completely drunk. Two of some admirers dragged him to the toilet, and from there they would take him home by taxi. Everything is like in the old days. If you are a normal person, then you will never become a real artist or poet. "And a scout," I thought. Perhaps that is why the entire CIA is filled with "outcasts" who are difficult to manage retired admirals and budding politicians.

But maybe that's why we win all the time, because from the outside

we look like fools.

"Let's have a drink," I suggested, pouring myself some vodka.

Chris looked at me in surprise, smiling at the corners of her lips.

For the victory of democracy! - proclaimed the historian, emptying his glass in one gulp according to the Russian tradition.

I took a few sips. It's still a very hard drink. Whiskey is nicer. Any Russian will be sincerely offended by hearing such a thing. Regardless of beliefs.

- How do you, historians, live in a democracy? I asked.

"Your American habit of drinking without eating makes me ecstatic," the historian confessed. - You have already drunk almost half a bottle and have not eaten anything. If you were a spy, you would be exposed right away.

"So, thank God I'm not a spy," I remarked humbly. — But you didn't answer my question: how do your writing brethren live in a democracy?

Yasha the bearded man waved his hand:

- Life is great. No censorship at all. No reviews needed. Write whatever you want. There is no place to publish. If you find a rich sponsor, you will be published, but if not, then sit and write on the table, as in the days of developed socialism. The old publishing houses have collapsed, and the new ones prefer publishing your Burroughs than risking some new names. In general, breathing has become easier, and living is more difficult.

"You won't believe it," I brightened up, "but I knew Burroughs personally. Or rather, he was a friend of my father, but he often visited your house and sometimes honored me with a conversation, although I was very small. I remember that he spoke very interestingly about the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, which he happened to witness when he arrived in December 1941 on some business to the Hawaiian Islands. But I don't want to talk about that. Do you know what he always dreamed of?

- About what?

- See your "Tarzan" in the "hard carpet". Do you understand? See it published in hardcover. I don't know if he saw it or not, but I recently bought a hardcover Tarzan from some local publishing house from some of your stalls. It seems, if I'm not mistaken, it's called "Logos".

— "Logos"? asked Yasha the historian. — I know this publisher. This is one of the first private publishing houses in the city. I took a couple of my manuscripts there, and I was even allowed to hope that everything would be fine.

- What topic do you write about? I inquired.

"About the fate of democracy in Russia," Yasha explained. - This is my favorite topic. It seems to me endless. And absolutely the same at any stage of Russian history.

— Is that how? I was surprised. What can you say about the current democracy in your country?

He laughed.

— Have you read Sigismund Herberstein's Notes on Moscow Affairs? These are travel notes.

a foreigner traveling in Russia in the first half of the 16th century.

"I didn't read it, unfortunately," I admitted. - I came across in the bibliography, but did not bother to read it.

"It's a pity," Yasha sympathized with my dullness. — Herberstein clearly saw the whole essence of Russian democracy back in the 16th century. And he came to an interesting conclusion: the Muscovite state is an absolute monarchy, limited by the institution of holy fools.

"Interesting," I said, not yet understanding what the historian was driving at.

- Do you know who the holy fools were in Rus'? Yasha the historian continued to test my erudition.

"I think so," I replied. - I even, I remember, read a very entertaining work by Ustryalov "The Holy Fools of Ancient Rus'", the manuscript of which is kept in one of our universities.

"Great," said the historian. - Although Ustryalov lived a long time ago, but if you read him, then you have a general idea. So, the holy fools in the old days were the only guarantor of democracy in the country. Firstly, under any terrorist regime, like the regime of Ivan IV, they enjoyed the right of personal immunity. That is, parliamentary immunity, in modern terms. Perfectly aware of this, they said the most unpleasant things to the kings in the face, and the kings listened in silence, although anyone else would have been immediately impaled for much less. Fools on business and idle excited the people, spread the wildest rumors and often served as a tool in the hands of opposition boyar groups. They were a kind of irreconcilable opposition, without bearing any positive beginning and any responsibility. Peter I decisively put an end to this democratic institution, but not completely. In any case, he deprived the holy fools of the right of personal immunity, and this, I believe, was his greatest merit. But the institution of holy fools continued to live, naturally, having changed somewhat, as everything changes along the spiral of time, without changing, however, its original essence. The institute of holy fools had the stupidity to restore Nicholas II by creating the so-called Duma. But I will not bore you with historical examples, but will go straight to our days. So, we have a freely elected President (if you do not go into details, of course), who has gone from an ordinary foreman to the first secretary of the regional committee and a candidate member of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee. He retained all the instincts and habits of a party nobleman, and in these conditions, when he opens his mouth, I always expect his lips to utter something like: "We, by the grace of God, the Tsar of All Rus' and the Grand Duke of Moscow, have counted for the good order to please...". And to prevent this from happening, the institution of holy fools was immediately revived.

Understanding his train of thought, I laughed heartily.

"Look," the historian continued, "all these so-called people's deputies of our various levels, all these Baburins, Astafievs, Isakovs, Konstantinovs, Pavlovs, Andronovs and others, and others, and others. These are typical fools. And in speeches, and in habits, and in reactions. I'm not talking about the former deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR: Umalatova, Alksnis and others. It's basically a circus. But they don't have immunity now, but these... First of all, like any holy fools, they are well aware of their right to immunity, and therefore, without embarrassment in any expressions, cover up and insult the President with their last words. And at the same time, they imagine themselves to be parliamentarians, although it is precisely such dirty swearing at the head of state that is the hallmark of the holy fool. They are well aware, however, that the wrath of the king can be terrible, and therefore they are constantly insured. As in the old days: one holy fool denounces the tsar, and the second suddenly yells heart-rendingly: "Orthodox! Streltsy are already coming from the Kremlin with axes, to chop off our heads!"

And the people are buzzing menacingly: "Do not touch the holy fools, tsar!" And now we have: Deputy Isakov accuses the President of treason and embezzlement of public funds, and Deputy Astafyev suddenly breaks through to the microphone and, squealing with excitement, announces that six covered cars with riot police have entered the Kremlin, by order of the President, and now "we will start cut off heads." Fools are constantly spreading the rumor that the tsar does not go to church, and in general "is not of our faith", and does not live with the tsarina, and established overseas orders at the court. Read and listen to what our modern holy fools say and write about the President. Firstly, the President is a Jew, secondly, he sold Russia to the US imperialists and the Zionists of Israel, and thirdly, he surrounded himself with covetous men and thieves. Everything is the same that has been said for centuries, when they stopped temporarily pulling out tongues with tongs, regardless of the institution. And what are they yelling at their rallies? Remember what the holy fools have always prophesied. There is a great plague, pestilence, trouble threatens the kingdom and "brother will rise against brother, son against father," and the people will be washed with blood. And the tsar's horns grew, he prays to the devil, and the real tsar (the tsar on the throne was always "inauthentic") languishes somewhere in Matrosskaya Tishina. And the current ones: there is famine, blood and civil war. As if those holy fools left notes and manuals for the current ones. So they stirred up the people, and the government resorted to repression. People were thrown into prisons, hanged, beheaded, whipped. And the fools? They were washed off to monasteries and no one dared to give them out from there. And then everything started all over again. Remember how they framed Tsarevich Alexei and his entire truly Russian party under the axe. Now they have already provoked several massacres in the capital with human casualties. Everyone knows the instigators, but try to do something with them. You can't even interrogate. Parliamentary Immunity!

"Very funny," I said. So what can be concluded from all this?

"Very simple," Yasha answered. - You asked me what I think about the current democracy. I answered: we have no trace of democracy, but there is an absolute monarchy, limited by the institution of holy fools.

"Still, we will not deny that a lot has changed," I disagreed. "Even the fact that you and I are sitting and talking like this would have been unimaginable just a few years ago.

"Of course," Yasha replied, "we couldn't meet here, but we could easily meet and talk, say, in the workshop of the same Zaikin.

"I don't remember you from Zaikin's workshop in those years," I said. "I have been there quite often.

"I was in the camp," Yasha replied calmly, "that's why you don't remember me. He served five years and spent two more years in exile in the north.

Here one of the girls, who until then silently listened to our learned conversation, chewing sandwiches with caviar and salami from Topchak's generosity, started up and announced not without a challenge:

"You, Yasha, have always been a fool. Now you are chatting with him, and he may be a snitch. Again you will get to Berkesov and back - to the zone.

- Have you met with Berkesov? I was surprised. "Who's the head of the city's Security Department now?"

- He was then still a very young investigator, - the historian smiled, - it seems, the captain of everything. What does "I met him" mean? They brought me to him for interrogation under escort. He led my criminal case under Article 70. Two of my articles on democratic centralism in the CPSU fell into their hands.

I sighed as I thought about how small the world is. Everywhere come across our "godchildren".

"And you say democracy," continued Yasha. - When the same guardsmen, instead of being put on trial and being in prison. They get promoted and serve the new regime with the same zeal...

"Yes," I agreed, not knowing what to say to all this. - Apparently, with a bloodless coup, there is no other way to do it. Of course, what is there to argue, everything is extremely confusing. You have given a rather vivid picture of the current political situation. How do you rate Ruslan Khasbulatov? As the main holy fool?

- This is generally a joke, - Yasha laughed. - Once upon a time there were political adventurers, and now the era of political homeless people has come. Do you know the abbreviation BOMZH?

"I only dealt with homeless people in this country," I muttered.

- Chechnya broke away, - Yasha continued with inspiration, - he does not represent anyone in the Supreme Council, he is not even a citizen of Russia and is deprived of citizenship of Chechnya. Nevertheless, he continues to head the Supreme Council of the new Russia. Isn't it funny? From the chair of the provincial assistant professor, he was catapulted to an unprecedented height. He is now in the last stage of decompression sickness, that is, he has absolutely no idea what he is doing, and, of course, he will not leave his place alive.

What about the vice president? I asked, remembering him at the word "ejected."

"The same," Yasha laughed. - The only difference is that ejection from the pilot's seat of an attack aircraft to the chair of the vice president was already the third for him. Prior to that, he had to eject from the cockpit of his plane when he was shot down in Afghanistan. I heard that you even have a law in America that does not allow a person who has survived even one ejection to occupy leadership positions, since it greatly affects brain activity. So it's no wonder he acts like a clown. Where has it been seen that the vice president scolded the president with a squeal and did not want to cooperate with him? The whole trouble is that for some reason we consider the administration of the state to be the easiest thing to do, and different people without any professions climb into these posts. They never knew how to do anything in their lives and did not want to, but govern the state - please. See what kind of people they are. Either professional party organizers with brains turned inside out, or former teachers of scientific communism or political economy, or, at best, failed colonels. Offer the same Rutskoi and Khasbulatov to manage at least an artel for stamping wardrobe numbers, and they will refuse, honestly saying: "I don't know how." And for some reason they think they know how to manage a state like Russia.

— Well, what prospects do you see for Russia? I asked. "Something is going wrong with you. There are holy fools in the parliament, crooks and adventurers in the government. The President himself is something between Boris Godunov and Leonid Brezhnev. Where is the exit?

"I don't see," Yasha admitted. - I don't see a way out. No country has ever been in such a hopeless situation as the former Soviet Union.

"Nonsense," I disagreed. - Countries have fallen into worse situations and come out of them with honor.

— In the 20th century? the historian did not believe.

"Of course," I confirmed. — Examples from the 15th century would be incorrect. Analogies

always suffer

- For example? Yasha looked at me incredulously.

"Germany, for example," I said.

- Good example! - Yasha laughed, - Germany, which in terms of living standards and economic power is already stepping on your heels.

"This is today's Germany," I objected, "but remember Germany in 1946. The country is torn apart, reduced to ruins by bombing and street fighting. Seven million homeless people and ten million refugees from Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Prussia, from the regions you occupied. People lived in the basements of destroyed houses, in bomb shelters, in ruins, just on the streets and in open fields. Only a third of the harvest and food aid allocated by the allies fell into the hands of the authorities for distribution by cards. Everything else fell on the black market, where it immediately became inaccessible to everyone except thieves and speculators. The average salary fluctuated between 200 and 400 marks, and a pound of butter cost 300 marks, a pack of cigarettes - 200 marks, and a pound of coffee - 700 marks! I read a secret report of the occupation administration, which spoke of three hundred thousand cases of registered tuberculosis, a 50% decrease in the birth rate, a 60% increase in the death rate compared to 1938 ... In Hamburg alone, or rather, in that pile of broken bricks that from it remained, 10,000 cases of hungry dropsy were found. There was no fuel. The mines of the Ruhr did not work. People burned furniture, books, trees from city parks. If a light bulb burned out, they lived by candlelight; if the candles ran out, they lived in darkness. The shops were empty and boarded up: As one of the then German publicists said, the Germans turned into primitive vagabonds, living by hunting for the remnants of lost civilizations. He argued that there was no hope, since the genetic structure of the nation was damaged, crippled by the horrors of the Nazi

regime, isolation from the world, exodus, gigantic emigration, dismemberment of the country. And then few people were worried about whether all Germans would die out or not. They die and it's good. But the people looked at themselves from the outside, were horrified and, instead of yelling at rallies, began to work. When you understand that you have to work and this is the only way out, you will have a very promising future, because you are now in an incomparably better position than post-war Germany, or even more so. Japan. You have only one resemblance to post-war Germany: you, like her, were deprived of the opportunity to mischief all over the world. But, fortunately for you, by other, more modern and humane means.

"Something I'm very relaxed today," flashed through my head. "I talk a lot."

Yasha was silent, plucking at his beard. A girl sitting next to him, listening attentively to me, suddenly said:

- Yes, he is lying, Yasha. He is not an American. Looking at how it spits our way. He's a snitch, I tell you for sure.

Yasha waved her off in annoyance, but asked:

— Indeed, where did you learn to speak Russian so well?

"I did my homework diligently at school and at the university," I said.

Yasha and his girl smiled incredulously.

I wanted to say something else, but at that moment one of the young people, who were scouring the halls in impeccably seated semi-tailcoats-liveries of club footmen, jumped up with a tray of glasses of champagne to our table and, putting the glasses on the table, whispered in my ear: " You

asking for the phone."

- Me? I asked loudly and drunkenly.

"They are asking for it," said the footman, taking my elbow with his free hand, as if wishing to bring me to my senses.

"Sorry," I muttered, climbing out from behind the table.

Yasha and the girl looked at each other, and Chris, busy talking with some other local celebrities, started up and asked: "Are you at the consulate?"

"No," I said, "I'll go to your apartment. If possible.

The guy in the livery led me to a small side room where one of his colleagues was standing guard over a telephone receiver placed on the table.

When I picked up the phone, both, as if on cue, left the room and closed the door tightly behind them.

Such ritual dances could only be performed in honor of one single deity. So I picked up the phone and asked:

"What are you up to, Colonel?"

- I sent a car for you, - demonstrating that he is not inclined to jokes, Berkesov said dryly, - come immediately.

It seemed to me that I had served in the KGB all my life, but did not even rise to the rank of ensign. Since he was supposed to send Berkesov to hell, but instead he asked:

— Where to come?

"You'll be taken," the Colonel hung up.

When I did the same, one of the young men was already handing me a coat and a hat.

"Follow me," he said, opening a dead door in the wall with what looked like a railroad key. We went to the stairs, passing the halls.

But the day of amazing meetings is not over yet. When I, accompanied by Berkesov's boy, descended the white marble of the main staircase, I ran nose to nose with General Orlov, who, accompanied by several people, was climbing up it.

"Hello," he said with a hint of surprise, breathing heavily.

"Hello," I replied without any pleasure. You are late as always.

"I'm never late," Orlov hissed ominously. - I'm here now to ... (he cursed dirty) I'll smash everyone. All these Topchaks, Burkovs and all this shit!

- What's happened? I was amazed at the general's rebellion.

- You imagine?! - saliva boiled on the haughty lips of the former KGB general. - My office, my humanitarian center (you know it), was driven to the currency of some Dutch Jew. And they sent me paper within a week to clear the room. I'll fucking clear their brains.

A heavy mat hung under the arches of the former palace of the Dowager Empress. All former: generals - former, palaces - former, communists - former and the former Soviet Union. And in the present - emptiness with a gloomy future. But Orlov could be understood. A good half of the mayor's office and the new administrative structures were his former subordinates. Of course, it was a shame from such an attitude on their part.

"You don't look well," I sympathized with him.

"Yes," he agreed. - I feel very bad. It would be necessary to give up for a couple of weeks on the Cote d'Azur, but every day it's one thing, then another.

He suddenly leaned towards me and said in a low voice in English:

Larsson was killed.

How were they killed? I didn't believe it.

"I don't know the details yet," whispered Orlov. — Found dead near his own house. They told me two hours ago. OK. Bye. See you.

"See you later," I replied, hoping that would never happen. But he was wrong. Too bad he was a healthy guy.

X

"Ruanova disappeared from the hospital," Berkesov said as soon as he saw me.

- How did you disappear? I didn't understand. "You deployed an entire army there.

"I don't know," the Colonel said irritably. "And I can't understand anything from what they report to me. Captain Gribov was constantly in the ward. He assures that. Ruanova was lying on a bunk with various tubes connected there. He averted his eyes to the side, looked somewhere at another wall. Well, let's even assume that he began to read the newspaper. When he looked again at the bunk, Ruanova was not there. All pipes hung, and even her dressing gown

stayed in place.

"Funny stories you tell me, Colonel," I drawled. "And your people... not that one?" When you hire them, do you test them for sanity or drug addiction?

"Stop making jokes," Berkesov said wearily. "You seem to have come here to catch the Coyote, not to get drunk with various anti-social elements in the city hall.

— Do you mean General Burkov or Topchak? I inquired.

"You know who I mean," Berkesov answered. - But you, apparently, were not at all interested in my message?

"Why?" I sighed. - I was very interested. But I'll tell you honestly, Colonel, I really want to sleep. We'll figure it out in the morning.

"By morning, she can run away so far that we won't catch her," Berkesov suggested.

"She's already so far away," I assured him, "that you'll never catch her again. However, not

I understand why you need it at all? That you have become attached to an unfortunate lonely woman?

- Enough! Berkesov abruptly interrupted my rantings. I thought he was going to slam his fist on the table. However, this has not come to this. The colonel pulled himself together, but continued to nervously pour out his displeasure at me:

"I got attached to a single woman? Didn't you connect her with your fantasies with the Coyote and even, like a thief, entered the dwelling? And now I'm attached to her! Are you all together decided to set me up? With these trains, with Coyote, with these voucher scammers?

"Calm down, Berkesov," I sympathized sympathetically. - Why are you so nervous? You also need to rest. The knots of all problems are always three-quarters untied themselves. By the way, did you send her home?

"Of course," Berkesov looked sullenly at the table. - Nobody. They asked the neighbors. You won't understand anything either. Some saw her almost today, others did not see her for several weeks. Still others claim that they often see her being taken away by an ambulance. Almost a day later. I ordered the apartment to be sealed.

"It's good that you didn't set up an ambush there," I quipped again. - And your people there, in the hospital, weren't they drunk with anything?

"We've checked everything," the Colonel said grimly. - Captain Gribov, about forty minutes before the emergency, asked the nurse on duty, when she entered the intensive care unit, for a glass of tea. She brought it, the captain drank. We checked the glass. Of course, this drink could not be called tea, but it did not contain anything harmful. The windows were closed. Moreover, this is the last floor. What do you say to that?

I was silent.

- Why are you silent? Berkesov asked. "Or are you waiting for some instructions from your superiors, who are expected in our city in the retinue of the arriving banker Torrelli?"

"It's amazing," I said, "everything you need to know, you always know. A simple job, how to follow the six of a woman dying of a heart attack, you are always beyond your power.

"There are no secrets here," the colonel explained, "Klimov told me about this from Moscow. And, as I understand it, Trokman himself called him, it seems, from Paris he asked to come to Leningrad. Klimov is also going here. Let's all catch the Coyote together.

"All right, Colonel," I took pity, "don't worry. I know where Coyote is, and would love to arrest him if I could.

We must give Berkesov his due - he controls himself excellently. He did not jump in his chair at my statement, did not utter any admiring or incredulous interjections, but looking at me coldly, he asked:

"And what's stopping you from arresting him?"

"It is impossible to arrest him, colonel," I said with a sigh, "he is under such a roof that neither you nor I can reach. But I will probably try to meet him, and I hope that the meeting will work out if you do not interfere with me.

- How can I stop you? Berkesov did not understand.

"Order your fellows not to follow me around," I suggested. "Then maybe I can do something.

Berkesov became even more gloomy:

- This is impossible.

- Interesting! I exclaimed. - Is the law on global surveillance of foreigners still in force? And it cannot be bypassed in any way without the permission of the Constitutional Court?

- Don't act like an idiot. the colonel said. "If something happens to you here, who will be responsible?" I will answer. I. I'm afraid that the answer is spinning with your head. And I don't have a spare.

"Enough, Colonel," I laughed. Who needs me here? Who needs me in this city where only harp-playing angels live?

"Don't explain," Berkesov grimaced. "You take your wallet full of dollars out of your pocket so famously that any seventh grader who collects money for a VCR can kill you. And I'm not talking about others. Don't you know what the crime situation is in the city? Four kills and six breaks per minute! That Leningrad, in which you once started your career, is long gone, but there is a gangster den. And only a revived Cheka can clean it up! With our real methods.

"Don't die of nostalgia, Colonel," I warned. "It is a very painful death. I don't want to explain common truths to you. You know them as well as I do. This is me about the Cheka. But back to business. So it's impossible to remove surveillance from me?

Berkesov was silent, letting me know that he was not going to repeat his arguments.

"Listen, Mr. Berkesov," I asked, "when I ran away from the Hermitage, did you guide me all the time?" Or calculated later, through the control room of the fleet? Or was the driver already your man? By the way, if so, I gave him twenty dollars. See if he passed them to the accounting department or not.

"We don't decipher our methods," the Colonel said. Yes, I don't go into details. I was informed that you left in a taxi. And I ordered not to take my eyes off you. You know as well as I do that there are thousands of methods, and which of them were used, I was not even interested. What, you want to throw something out again?

"But we need to somehow end this story with Coyote," I shrugged. - Klimov will come. What will you report to him? How did your people miss Coyote in the underpass and Ruanova in the hospital? I think that you will be asked more severely for this than if someone takes my wallet from me.

- I have a lot of things to report to Klimov. I will report on your proposal. If he takes responsibility for your safety, then please. Go wherever you want. At least in the night katrans to Ligovka, where in the morning there are always five or six corpses.

"And you yourself will take advantage of the opportunity to finish me off, attributing everything to the Coyote," I thought to myself, drunk, I don't know why. "No, I'll have to use some little tricks again. Apparently, that taxi driver was real, otherwise I would never have found Ruanova at home. Then the driver told them where he took me, and everything became clear to them. In That moment the lights went out in the apartment.

I seem to have dozed off, sitting in an armchair opposite Berkesov, since the colonel, when I

looked up, gave me a cup of coffee.

"Thank you," I rejoiced. "If you would let me smoke, too?"

"Smoke," Berkesov grimaced. - Do what you want.

I took a sip of my coffee and puffed on my cigarette with pleasure. Since Berkesov is so kind, it means that he is worried not only about the disappearance of Ruanova from the hospital, where a whole platoon was waiting in ambush for Coyote. And I, the old fool, also succumbed to this vision that the Coyote would break through to Jeanne, destroying everything around with a machine gun or blowing up the hospital building with some kind of new mine disguised as a clyster tube.

"While you were dozing," Berkesov said, taking a sip of coffee, "I decided not to be interested in the details connected with Coyote and Ruanova. This is so much beyond my comprehension that if you please, enlighten General Klimov on this issue yourself.

"For God's sake," I said, "if General Klimov is interested. You can send it directly to me. And at the same time, don't forget to intercede to have my surveillance removed.

"We will assume that we have dealt with this," Berkesov summed up. "After all," he said as if justifying himself, "Coyote is your operation. I just had to help you. Since you figured it out on your own, as I understand you, and not only do you not need any of my assistance, but, on the contrary, you even want me to relieve myself of responsibility for your safety, then report to Klimov that way.

"Well, well, well," I agreed, "you talk too much about this, Colonel. Don't worry. In a conversation with Klimov, I will present all your actions to capture the Coyote in the best possible light. The general will clearly understand that you have done everything that only possible.

"And confirm that there was no light in the underground passage," Berkesov reminded.

"Dear Colonel," I remarked, "if all the searchlights in the world were shining there, the result would be the same, I assure you.

The Colonel looked at me with a hint of gratitude.

Still, he was afraid of Klimov, like no one else in the world. That's what I thought, but I was wrong. Berkesov was not at all afraid of Klimov.

"And don't forget to tell him," continued Berkesov, "about Dr. Larsson and his visits to the consulate...

"Speaking of Larsson," I interrupted Berkesov. Do you know that he died?

- When? - Berkesov's face showed that he really did not know anything and was very surprised.

"Today." I glanced at my watch. "Actually, yesterday.

Mon clock showed 20 minutes of the first night.

Under what circumstances and where? - Berkesov hesitantly took up the telephone receiver, but, apparently, changed his mind and removed his hand.

"I don't know the details yet," I replied, "but I think we'll all know in a few hours.

And now, with your permission, Colonel, I'll still go to bed, if you care so much about my safety, then order them to take me at least to the consulate. I no longer dare to ask for a lift to the Petrograd Side.

"They will take you wherever you say," Berkesov paused, as if not daring to say anything. "But wait a minute. There are a few more questions that I would like to resolve before the arrival of the general.

- Is he arriving tomorrow morning? I started to get up from the chair, but sat back down.

"Probably," said the Colonel. "Therefore, I apologize for not giving you the opportunity to go to rest. Moreover, this case is also connected with you. We are talking about those echelons that I, or rather, we detained at the station.

I wanted to answer that in the case of these echelons, I became the same victim of disinformation, as, I hope, Berkesov also became, but the colonel gestured me not to interrupt him.

- I received information from Moscow that it is necessary to detain a cargo of strategic weapons intended almost for Saddam Hussein. I say "almost", because no one really told me who exactly this cargo was intended for. All such operations were always coordinated by you and Klimov. I connected only as a performer if our region was used for transportation. There were no weapons in the echelons, but some kind of commercial cargo. Agree that it's not my fault.

"Of course," I said, "don't worry. All this is so obvious that I do not understand the reasons ...

"Nevertheless," Berkesov continued, "when I reported this to General Klimov, he ordered the trains to be kept under arrest until further notice, hinting that it was still necessary to figure out why missiles suddenly turned into scrap metal on the territory of our region. I am compelled to carry out the order, and you probably know what a commotion this caused in certain circles of our city. You witnessed how Topchak rushed to the station. If there were missiles in the echelons, not even missiles, but some spare parts for tanks or obsolete aircraft, all this would look different. As for commercial licensed cargo... In general, they have already begun to threaten me, the head of the Security Department, from the mayor's office, where they hint that I am too young and inexperienced for my position, to anonymous phone calls, where they threaten to kill my family. Therefore, I would like you to explain to me why you and Klimov decided to detain these echelons?

"I assure you," I said, "that I no longer have anything to do with these echelons. You know very well my task: to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction that previously belonged to the Soviet Union throughout the world. Non-ferrous metals are not means of mass destruction, but rather are means of mass enrichment.

I allowed myself to laugh and continued:

- Perhaps Klimov was impressed by the personality of Belov-Kobanenko and the story he told. And he wants to do something about it. If this Arzamas gang is able to smuggle any cargo to all parts of the world with equal ease, then it deserves attention from your department.

Berkesov looked at me strangely:

- Do you think that this Kobanenko told us the truth?

"If he lied, it was very coherent," I remarked.

"Not very coherent," Berkesov disagreed. "However, our criminals are able to tell legendary stories much better than professional illegal intelligence officers. Where do you think he went when I let him go?"

"Probably to the station," I suggested, "to my echelons."

"Nothing happened," Berkesov chuckled. "He went straight to Smolny, where, after the elimination of the regional committee, the mayor's office was located."

"Isn't it for Topchak?" I started to like this story even more.

- No, not to Topchak, - said the colonel, - but to one of the heads of departments of the mayor's office. From him, he independently tried to contact Anokhin. With General Anokhin, if you remember. But Anokhin is not in Moscow. He is currently in London for the symposium "Peoples of the World for a Nuclear-Free Future". He represents the Russian organization Into the 21st Century Without Nuclear Weapons.

I knew this organization. It all consisted of former and current senior KGB officers and set itself a very romantic task: that by the beginning of the next century, only Russia and those whom it would allow would retain nuclear weapons. They decided to play this childish game, most likely due to lack of information. But they played with the full seriousness of children, depicting the life and death of Joaquin Murietta on wooden horses.

- Belov spoke with one of Anokhin's deputies, - the colonel continued, - in a very figurative cipher, such as "the goods in St. Petersburg were taken from garbage." General Anokhin is a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, now Russia. Interestingly, did he come up with a similar thieves, but obvious cipher for communication? In any case, his deputy, after listening to Belov, calmly said that he was not aware of the matter, but would report everything to Anokhin when he returned. Five minutes later, Klimov called me and ordered to detain the trains, which I was about to release, until further notice. What do you think Belov-Kobanenko began to do next? He's not so stupid as not to realize that by letting him go, I put him under close surveillance. But, apparently, he considered, especially after he was released, that I was also in the game and from my side he was no longer in danger. Moreover, the head of the department of the city hall - my former colleague - assured him that everything would be settled with me, up to the return of the pistol with an apology.

"Ah, scoundrel," I thought, "so you continue to bug the mayor's office, as your predecessors bugged the regional committee?"

But aloud, of course, he did not say anything, but only nodded his head like a porcelain Buddha.

- Leaving Smolny, Belov caught a taxi and went to the Petrozavodsk Hotel in one of the new districts of the city. Two floors of this hotel are occupied by representatives of various agricultural cooperatives of the fertile south of the former USSR. I thought that this was an ordinary Central Asian gang that controlled prices for agricultural products in the system of collective farm markets in the city, and I watched them half-heartedly, giving complete freedom of action to the police. Dealing with such matters is very dreary. You yourself will be smeared in shit, and the result will be insignificant. A certain "Uncle Sasha" is in charge of this whole company. So our Belov ran to him.

— Aha! I guessed. - I remember. This is his former godfather, whom everyone called Alik. Kobanenko later learned that the godfather moved north. That's what he said: "it seems to Petersburg" - if I remember correctly.

"I thought so too," Berkesov grinned, "but it turned out that it was not entirely true. Or rather, not at all. This "Uncle Sasha" is none other than Ali Maksudovich Kasimov, the former first secretary of a large regional committee of one of our former Central Asian republics...

"Who, according to Kobanenko, currently lives in Bahrain," I put in.

"Quite right," Berkesov confirmed, "but he does not live in Bahrain, but here in Okhta, although he has a Lebanese passport."

"Is it possible that such a prominent figure," I was amazed, "is now engaged in such trifles as collecting tribute from tomato traders?"

- Of course not. Berkesov flared up. "Maybe it's nice for him, for old times' sake, to control all the collective farm markets, as he did while sitting in the regional committee. But here he controls the Seaport and all the cargo going through it in all directions. He holds Marchenko in his hands, and through him everything: exports, imports, logistics and food supply of the city, region and a good part of the country.

"Poor Marchenko," I thought.

So arrest Marchenko. Take a statement from him. Destroy this nest in the Petrozavodsk Hotel, find out who this former regional committee secretary is working for now and ...

"Arrest the entire mayor's office," continued Berkesov, "all the bankers, the entire Petrograd Soviet, the entire Supreme Soviet, and so on ad infinitum."

He paused, then looked at me defiantly. Although maybe I it seemed.

Are you really advising me to arrest Marchenko?

"Knowing you, Colonel," I replied, "I'm willing to bet that Marchenko has already been arrested.

Berkesov blushed, but pretended not to hear my remark.

"Many advise me to do this," he burst out, "because it is impossible to arrest Kasimov. He is a foreign national.

Does he have a diplomatic passport? I asked. - Is he officially accredited in St. Petersburg as a representative of the Lebanese government?

Berkesov sighed and said:

"Find out for yourself who he is accredited to, but I can't arrest him, and I don't have the right to make decisions on expulsion. Do you know what he said when he saw Kobanenko? "You, well done, Vitya. You did everything right. Justified the trust. Let them choke on these echelons. The main thing is that we did our job."

- What's the matter? I asked.

"I would like to know it myself," admitted Berkesov, "I would like to know a lot. But nothing works. Either the boss pulls, or circumstances do not allow. Do you know who visited Kasimov recently? Dmitriev is the Fuhrer of the All-Russian "Memory".

I made an effort not to show too much interest.

- So what? What follows from this?

- And the fact that through the "Memory" weapons go to the Middle East. And Kasimov is, apparently, a representative of the client. So, while you and I are counting the brass ingots, the rockets slipped into the port and went to the address. Take it as a version. Dmitriev does not go to St. Petersburg in vain. They can yell at rallies without him.

- So what exactly did Dmitriev talk to Kasimov about? I asked.

"Nothing," said the colonel, spreading his hands. "Are they small and don't understand that all hotels are eavesdropped, and our agents are hovering around them?" Dmitriev organized several so-called "Russian farms" and asked Kasimov to allow some of the products to be sold in the city's markets. And he said: "Sell, Vasya, dear. Sell what you want. I treated my friend with your potatoes. He said: "Oh, the potatoes are good. Let Vasya send a barrel of pickled cucumbers." To which Dmitriev replied: "Say so, Alik, if a Jew eats my cucumber, he will die right away." "The Gide doesn't like cucumbers," Alik answered. "The Gide loves carrots. But your carrot, Vasya, frankly, was not a success."

"Just World War II slang," I said.

"It's slang," Berkesov confirmed. - And in this slang, "carrot" means non-ferrous metal. So someone left these echelons because "the carrot failed." Carrot, which the Jew loves. So why did all the mafia structures in the city, including the mayor's office, get alarmed then?

"So this is your direct duty," I said, "to find out at least for whom this Kasimov works. I understand that we do not have the strength to arrest him, but you simply must know everything about him.

— I know who Dmitriev works for. And I am sure that he and Kasimov are working together, - answered the colonel.

I felt very uncomfortable, waiting for what Berkesov would say. Is it really impossible to hide anything from the KGB monster?

"They work," the colonel continued, "as they did before, for the CPSU.

"The old woman died a long time ago," I replied, not so much expressing my confidence in this fact as wanting to find out as much as possible from Berkesov. Sleep and fatigue with me like a hand removed.

"That's what you want to think," the colonel objected, "but you know better than anyone else that the old woman didn't die, but ran away with the jewels, changing her last name." And you and I, if your memory is not short, packed her suitcase together.

"Yes," I agreed. "But we put such a small thing in her suitcase so that she wouldn't run far. And the suitcase was too heavy.

"Nevertheless," Berkesov said, "I am sure that nothing happened with you or with us, as you wish. The old woman is alive and continues to act. And all these unimaginable balls are not created by chance.

"You remind me of a mouse," I smiled, "which is sure that there is no animal worse than a cat. There are structures in the world that are both stronger and more terrible than your former CPSU. The CPSU simply dissolved in these structures by 1991, and it is possible that some fanatics think differently about the numbers of the former party nomenclature of the middle hand, continuing to believe that they serve the CPSU and even romanticize their position, believing that they are operating underground. We won't have them

dissuade. Moreover, the fusion of Bolshevism and Islam gives very interesting results, which have not yet been fully studied, unfortunately. In a hundred years, this will all resolve itself when people realize that happiness is not in rockets, but in the means of guiding them.

I liked my last sentence so much that I laughed. I really did have fun. If Berkesov thinks that "Pamyat" works for the CPSU because the CPSU created it, and Kasimov - because he was once the secretary of the regional committee, then, of course, it was difficult to object to such iron logic. And who do Vidasov, Prutikhin, Burkov, Orlov and ... all of them work for? Really, none of them understand that they have all been working for the DOLLAR for a long time! No, they don't understand. They all seem to see some kind of games, conspiracies, multi-way combinations and tank wedges, beautifully drawn on the map and covering the whole world. So they were brought up just by the very people who had the intelligence to understand what they had done and to escape in time.

With suitcases full of dollars.

I felt sorry for Berkesov. He reminded me of a little boy, abandoned in a strange and cold forest, wrapped in barbed wire. Where people roam - terrible, merciless and always hungry beasts.

And he is especially terrified, because he built this forest with his own hands and became almost a general in it.

"In a hundred years," repeated Berkesov. - You say that in a hundred years everything will be fine.

"Maybe in two hundred," I said, so as not to disappoint him completely. "But everything is bound to happen. The main thing is that your country will live. Now shit and pus are coming out of her, and fresh blood is pouring in. She will live very well, burying all her chimeras and utopias. But we got very distracted. So what happened next with Belov?

"He was taken by car to one of their, so to speak, residences in another part of the city.

I gave the address.

Berkesov's eyebrows rose in surprise.

"You also know too much of what you should not have known at all," said He.

It was the address of General Orlov's office, which someone in the mayor's office had sold for hard currency to some Dutch Jew. Probably a jeweler.

XI

In the morning, while shaving with an electric razor (I really don't like it) at the consulate, I turned on the TV. The aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk floated darkly on the screen, judging by the huge number 63 on its superstructure. The aircraft carriers of our fleet are permanent TV stars. When they arrange their show concerts, the whole world watches them with bated breath.

"...they believe," the announcer said, "that a second strike on Iraq could be inflicted within the next few hours."

It turns out that I missed the first blow in the hustle and bustle of yesterday. I arrived at the consulate at three in the morning and the guards did not want to let me through for a long time. Sneaking into Crump's office, where there was a sofa, I fell on it and instantly fell asleep. And in vain.

Because another letter from Coyote was waiting for me in the office. Which was brought by none other than the late Dr. Larsson. The day before yesterday, I explained to everyone that if this person appears again, he must be immediately detained. Everyone knew about it - from Berkesov's "militiamen" and our marines at the entrance to Aunt Jane in the office of the consulate. But no one lifted a finger. And thank God. I did not check or shine through the letter, as I did last time, but simply opened it and praised myself for my ingenuity. Larsson brought me the notice of his own death. And again he took advantage of the press. The newspaper clipping read:

"Stockholm (AP) - Released on bail yesterday, the recently arrested Dr. Larsson was found dead on his doorstep this evening. The corpse was discovered by a milkmaid who called the police. The police commissioner does not rule out the possibility of a violent death, but stressed that there were no signs of violence on Larsson's corpse not found. The results of the autopsy will not be known until tomorrow. As we reported, Dr. Larsson was accused of illegal medical practices related to human organ transplants. His unexpected death has already generated a lot of rumors of both criminal and mystical content. The investigation continues."

I didn't run around the consulate showing everyone Coyote's photograph, I decided not to tell Berkesov or anyone else about the atom.

I was invited to visit again, hoping that I would not be as talkative as the last time. And I decided to comply. How can I come to visit, so that a whole crowd of Berkesov's fellows does not burst in after me, apparently, I had to come up with it myself, And I decided to try. Perhaps the arrival of Mr. Torrelli will give me a suitable opportunity. Let's see.

I continued to shave and watch the TV screen. "Kitty Hawk", turning to the wind, began to release planes.

Saddam Hussein should learn well that he is only allowed to run amok within the strict confines of his insane asylum.

And no missiles and ultra-long-range guns will help him, even if he gets them. This should have been understood long ago by those who bet on it. But, nevertheless, they stubbornly continue to squander their money on this sick horse.

I found a jar of instant coffee at Crump's, brewed a cup for myself and sat down at the coffee table, squinting with pleasure, like a Texas cat, began to drink it, feeling how energy spreads along with fragrant moisture throughout my body. On the TV screen, Saddam Hussein in the uniform of a field marshal and with a pistol broadcast from the podium about his invincibility.

Somehow we put into the computer all the data about Saddam, as well as data on his conduct of an equally dashing foreign and domestic policy. And they asked the question: who is he? The computer didn't hesitate for a second to tell us that Saddam was an Israeli spy.

Indeed, from setting up his nuclear reactor under Israeli bombs in 1981 and up to the Kuwaiti adventure in 1991, all of Saddam's actions were directed in such a way that only Israel benefited from them in the end. With its high-profile military victories, the Israeli army did nothing but unite the Arab world against itself more and more. And Saddam Hussein, as if demonstrating to his bosses in Tel Aviv what kind of boobies they are, with one movement of his hand he broke away from the Arab world

Egypt, and then split this world altogether, daring to challenge the king of Saudi Arabia himself. If you think about it, it was Colonel Lawrence, but on a much larger scale. However, what to take from the computer? All computers are based on Aristotelian logic, according to which computers live, not people. People, for the most part, are schizophrenics, and in the name of marshal's epaulettes they are able to shame the logic of any computer.

My thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of Crump. Knowing him well, I understood from the expression on his face that he would now lay out something important for me, and I was not mistaken.

It turns out that Frank, through his agents in the city, arranged for my meeting with Yitzhak-Dmitriev. When I asked how this would happen, Crump wrote a few words on a piece of paper and handed it to me.

"Clever," I said. - But it must be very expensive.

Frank raised his eyes to the sky, as if to say: "What can you do?"

He gestured for me to look out the window.

On the street at the entrance to the consulate, police officers urgently installed metal barriers. A bus drove up, from which at least a platoon of OMON in helmets, with shields and batons, poured out.

On the boulevard running in the middle of Furshtatskaya Street, there were about a dozen old women with billboards and posters on which were written: "Yankees! Hands off Iraq!", "No to Zionism!", "We are with you, brotherly people of Iraq!" , "Zionism will not pass!" and the like according to the old method: "Cuba - yes, Yankees - no!"

The old women were put in their places by the well-known TV journalist in the city Gleb Venzorov. A very talented guy! I rarely got to see his broadcasts, but what I saw delighted me. The current Russian democracy still differs so little from totalitarianism that it needs to be bitten very painfully every hour so that it does not forget about the new times. And he did it wonderfully, causing a whole sea of \u200b\u200bfire. But the fire died down, the smoke drifted away, and Venzorov daily appeared on the television screen either in the guise of red, or brown, or in Orthodox humility, or in a whirlwind of militant chauvinism. For each old woman with posters, he received 10 dollars and honestly gave each 3,000 rubles for three hours of standing where he indicated and with the right poster, the content of which the grandmothers were not even supposed to know. He arranged them beautifully and shot them beautifully. He was a chronicler, but a good feature film director must have perished in him.

I looked at the old women with posters and the riot police in full gear behind the metal barriers and waited for the further development set by Kramp
performance.

Dmitriev's blackshirts, led by their leader, jumped out of an army car that drove up. There were not many of them - about 20 people, but from somewhere a motley crowd materialized, surrounding the blackshirts, and in a moment it began to seem to me that I was on the set of an action movie dedicated to the storming of Rome by the hordes of Attila.

Yellow-black, St. Andrew's and red banners. The roar amplified by loudspeakers, from which it was possible to make out only the constantly repeated word: "Jews!", angry faces, the dynamics of the crowd, barely restrained by the riot police cordon.

Some police major with a loudspeaker in his hands tried to shout over them: "Citizens! Be calm! Do not interfere with traffic! Please clear

roadway! Calm down, citizens!"

Both sides of the carriageway, together with the boulevard, represented one many-headed roaring creature.

Suddenly, Dmitriev himself appeared on some hill, greeted with a howl of delight.

"Brothers," he shouted into the electric megaphone. "We must throw off the Zionist yoke, the cursed yoke of the Jews who shed oceans of Russian blood!" We will never allow the Zionists of Israel to drag their bloody paws to the throat of our brother, comrade Saddam Hussein! We have drawn up a demand for the President of the United States, which we wish to convey to the official representative of the corrupt American government. These demands are simple: no support for Israel and the elimination of the UN decision by which this state was formed, since the Zionists do not recognize any UN decisions that are trying to save our Arab brothers from genocide! From the same genocide that has almost destroyed the Russian people! Brothers...

I looked out the window in a completely sincere admiration. What kind of surprises does not present us with Mother Nature or God's providence!

Towering above the crowd, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi was like two drops of water similar to the great Russian prince Alexander Nevsky. Of course, not on that Alexander Nevsky, which he was in reality, but on how he is now depicted by patriotic painters. Russian beard, blue eyes, stern and determined look. Haven't Yitzhak been replaced in the maternity hospital after all? I wonder if he's circumcised or not? Probably not. After all, he goes to the sauna with his bodyguards and girls. It would have been exposed long ago. If Israel has at least a company of people like Yitzhak, then this country is really capable of blowing up the whole world!

— Brothers! Dmitriev continued to stir up the crowd, "We will now go to this American, this Zionist nest and convey our demands to them!" Let them know the demand of the Russian people and tremble, for the hour of their destruction is drawing near!

Dmitriev with a folder in his hands moved to the fence, dragging the crowd along with him. OMON, hiding behind shields, bristled with batons. From the booth at the entrance of the consulate, the police officer on duty was excitedly reporting something on the phone, apparently calling for help.

Dmitriev stopped in front of the fence. He really resembled the legendary Russian prince, who stood in front of the formation of the Teutonic knight dogs.

- Russian banners - forward! he commanded.

Three banners: yellow-black, Andreev and Bolshevik - fluttered behind the back of the Israeli resident.

- Make way for the Russian banners! roared Dmitriev.

Climbing onto the roof of a police van, Venzorov filmed the whole scene, which, had it been staged in Hollywood, would have cost no less than two million dollars.

"You're a great director, Gleb," I thought. "If I ever get rich, I'll buy you a studio in Hollywood, and we'll shoot Russian militants there from the times of perestroika and glasnost."

"Citizens," the police major yelled through a bullhorn, "the US consular officers do not want to accept any demands from you. They are not authorized to take any demands from public organizations and individuals. They accept all demands

only through diplomatic channels through the local branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs..."

The roar of the crowd drowned out the major's words. Dmitriev waved his hand. Stones and pieces of lit tow flew from the crowd. Many had iron bars in their hands. It seemed that another moment and a new Battle on the Ice would begin. As much as Dmitriev resembled Alexander Nevsky and the OMON resembled the knights of the Teutonic order. Especially when viewed from above from the box that I occupied. I have not been to the theater for a long time and, of course, I have lost a lot. No movie can replace a live performance.

"Citizens," the major yelled, hiding behind a chain of riot police. "The employees of the US consulate agree to accept one person of your choice with your demands. Choose one person and stop the rampage, citizens! Do not interfere with the peaceful rest of the workers in neighboring houses!"

The crowd backed off.

Dmitriev went through the cordon.

I moved away from the window with some annoyance. The show was over. Weekdays interrupted for half an hour began.

Dmitriev was met by Frank.

He attentively listened to the leader of the "Memory" and accepted the demand, issued in the form of an address, on the cover of which an equestrian knight in an old Russian helmet mercilessly cut with a sword a host of tailed dragons with Jewish noses. I don't know what the artist wanted to say, but I felt sorry for the knight, since it became obvious from the composition of the picture that, despite the fighting enthusiasm, the dragons would still devour him along with the horse.

Dmitriev demanded that Crump read the petition aloud in front of him.

"I don't read Russian well," Crump tried to protest. "I'd rather do... how is it?" - translation ... coup - in english - english ...

"Nothing," Dmitriev said rudely. - You eat Russian bread all the time, but you can't read? Read on, otherwise we are here, - he grinned, - we will baptize you according to the Orthodox rite.

"You stand on US soil," snapped Crump. - Rudeness is not needed. I will read whatever you want, but my government will protest...

"Let's read," Dmitriev interrupted him, "and then protest as much as you like!"

Having made a similar preamble for Berkesov's "hearers" and forcing Crump to tediously and slowly read the petition of "Memory", creating the impression that Dmitriev was patiently, without interrupting, waiting for the end, we went through two vestibules into a small room where it was possible to say with certainty that no one will listen to us. Just in case, I once again checked everything with instruments and, for insurance, turned on two metronomes tuned to different frequencies. The petition was long. It listed all the crimes of Israel and the United States since the days of Theodor Hertzl and Theodore Roosevelt. So we had twenty minutes. Crump read slowly, slurring words, beginning to read each sentence again and commenting. If Dmitriev came to the consulate, and Berkesov could not write anything down, that would also be very bad.

What secrets can there be between American diplomats (and even more so intelligence officers) and the leader of an openly Nazi organization, hooligan in an aura of impunity?

The best thing Berkesov could think of was that the official representatives of the United States of America are planning with Dmitriev to organize Jewish pogroms in order to further destabilize the situation in Russia.

So the risk from this meeting was mutual, but it was absolutely impossible to proceed without understanding the situation.

"Don't overdo it," I told Yitzhak, sealing the door behind me. - Otherwise, the situation can get out of control, as in the 30s.

"That's impossible," he replied. There was no Israel then. Could the Holocaust have happened if Israel had existed? Never. Yes, and we did not start this whole thing in the 30s. You
you know that very well.

"But they tried to control the process," I reminded him. - And they broke the thread.

"All right," Yitzhak sighed. "We're not at a symposium on recent history. Tell me what you need from me. And faster. Do you have any idea what I'm risking by coming here. I don't have legal status like you. If they suspect me of something, they will simply tear me to pieces ...

Both of us, an American and an Israeli, spoke Russian. I was not sure that Ben-Zvi knew English, and I knew Hebrew through a stump-deck. Russian, thus, became the language of interstate communication.

"Good," I said. "We don't like that you always get in the way under our feet, interfering with work. What kind of games are you playing here behind our back, connecting to our networks and systems. Or do you think we don't notice anything?

"We don't play any games," Ben-Zvi looked at me angrily. — None. Unlike you, who joyfully weave lace here for a century and a half, hoping to turn this country into an eternal dollar reserve. We solve here only one task: to gather all our people in the land of Israel, as was bequeathed by Moses and the great prophets of the sacred land. The Torah is our only instruction, and in it, if you have read it, it clearly says: "The Lord your God ... will gather you from all the peoples among whom He will sow you ... Even though you are scattered to the ends of heaven, the Lord will gather you from there, Your God... and will bless you and multiply you more than your fathers... And then the Lord your God will turn all curses on your enemies and those who hate you..."

"Listen," I said. "I hope you're not going to read the entire Torah to me?"

It was noticeable that Yitzhak had not had the opportunity to quote the Pentateuch aloud for a long time, and this gave him particular pleasure.

"I'm not quoting the Torah to you," he snorted. — I'm answering your question, what our service here does. Only the emigration of Jews. But they are so rooted to the ground here that they all need to be shaken properly so that they remember why the Lord created them on this Earth. And that he commanded them all to assemble in Israel after their dispersion. Like this. I don't know, maybe someone else enjoys photographing the rotten railway bridges and rusty cruisers here or stealing blueprints copied from you with new weapon systems, but we have known this for a long time.

"Well, you're in vain," I disagreed. They have some very interesting stuff. We even, frankly speaking, did not expect. With their help, you could drive your Arab friends somewhere beyond the Tien Shan, or even further.

"We do not set ourselves such a goal," Ben-Zvi persisted. "Our only goal is to gather the people in the land of Israel. And we have our own stuff. We just don't use them yet. Their time has not come. For the Lord did not accept Abraham's sacrifice..."

I have seen a lot in my life and it would seem that it is already difficult to surprise me with anything. But looking at Yitzhak, I felt as if I was present at a demonstration of one of the great wonders of the world. Could it be that just a few minutes ago this man was roaring anti-Jewish slogans into a megaphone to the roar and whistle of his supporters?! Are they that blind? This is not Alexander Nevsky at all, but a typical Old Testament prophet, as if descended from Doré's biblical illustrations! I also remembered a verse from the Holy Scriptures: "What sin did they or their parent have, that they were born blind?" It seems so, but I'm not sure, I only read the Bible once while I was in jail for two weeks in California State Penitentiary for contempt of court.

"You think," Yitzhak continued, "that it was you who ruined the USSR with your military and economic might, and that you still can't get rid of the intoxication of pride. But it wasn't like that. In this patchwork empire, the Jews have always been the cementing principle. Even arousing universal hatred, they rallied the rest. As soon as the number of Jews who left reached a critical mass, everything here began to fall apart before our eyes. Many thanks to Joseph Stalin here. He shook them so that they would last a hundred years. So no one can. And we simply do not let them forget themselves in this country and imagine it as their homeland. A Jew can have only one homeland - Israel. When he forgets about it - we immediately tell him about

we remind you of this.

- And what, Stalin worked for you? I asked in amazement at what I heard.

"I don't know who he worked for there," Yitzhak replied, "but I heard something from Golda herself. All I can tell you is that Stalin respected the Book, although few people knew about it. Before his eyes, the prophecy of three thousand years ago came true - the revival of Israel. This made a strong impression on the old generalissimo. He was a very superstitious man and no less conceited. He wanted to have a hand in the realization of the prophecy spoken by the Lord himself. Moreover, Golda knew how to tell all this much more eloquently than I did.

"So you arrived in Petersburg," I summed up, "exclusively to remind your people of their most important task at this stage.

"Of course," Ben-Zvi nodded his head. - I have no other tasks. Well, perhaps, to hang such weights of anti-Semitism around the neck of this country so that it will never get up from all fours.

I doubtfully shook the annual: "I'm afraid that you will still play to the Jewish pogroms."

- What are you so afraid of? asked Ben-Zvi. Pogroms are not the Holocaust. What are pogroms? Well, five or six Jews will be killed. But, how will everyone else grow wiser!

He paused, sighed, and added:

"Just let me calm you down. Local residents have degraded so much in recent years that they are no longer capable of even a Jewish pogrom. Any pogrom will result in the destruction of grocery stores and Caucasian shops. Do not make me laugh. You work here so much, but you don't see what this country has become? History has never known such a collapse. They may sincerely dislike the Jews, but they hate each other much more. And it leaves an imprint on

All.

He got up:

- OK. Did you find out everything you wanted to? I have to go.

"Just a minute," I said. — Gathering "your people", you do not forget your Muslim cousins in the Petrozavodsk Hotel.

"That's my business," Ben-Zvi snapped. "They don't concern you. My organization needs money. The Party created us, and the Party must support us. Kasimov is not Islam at all. This is the CPSU. When this gang went into the bushes, I mean the CPSU, they left something here for the so-called confidants. A trifle. The main wealth ended up in Western banks. Kasimov is one of the distributors of the CPSU money left in the country. And we convinced him to finance us. A Jewish pogrom is a complicated matter, and you can burn down a hotel in five minutes. And we are indestructible, because we embody the Russian idea...

"And you sell rockets," I added.

He laughed.

- For us, the worst thing is not to have a real enemy now. Do you know Jews? Remove the sword of Damocles from them, and everyone will begin to teach each other how to live. Missiles must not only threaten us, but from time to time also burst over our cities. So I'm sorry, what you're looking for came to us. And we will decide what to do next with this music. If necessary, we will deliver to Baghdad in a container of some French company, if necessary, we will launch it under our own power with a nuclear warhead.

His eyes became hard and cold.

"When the time comes," I thought, "they'll launch something under their own power on Washington. After all, he even considers the United States nothing more than a waiting room for Israel."

- All this is wonderful, - I agreed, - we have now found out that you are not only collecting "your people" in this country, but also scrap metal. But did you come to St. Petersburg for another reason?

"You bore me," Yitzhak replied. Why did I come, who did I come to. I am a well-mannered person and therefore I cannot tell you that all this is none of your business. When necessary, we inform you about many things. I didn't steal your rockets. You missed them yourself, but we found them - just fifty kilometers from the border of Iran with Azerbaijan. And honestly bought for cash, wrapping them in Armenia through the Lachin corridor. Don't listen to me. I'm lying to you, of course. As it was in reality, even I myself do not know for sure.

"Do not flatter yourself," I reassured him, "that I am listening to you, as your ancestors listened to the prophet Moses. I do not believe, of course, a single word of what you said. Let the State Department deal with these missiles, and I don't think that they will send you an order from Tel Aviv for this.

"We don't have any orders," Yitzhak replied gloomily. - It's time to know. As for everything else, starting with Desert Storm, you have made so many mistakes in the region that your State Department will thank us that we are cleaning up these mistakes to the best of our ability. But if you, because of the issues we have been discussing, have declared an urgent need for a personal meeting with me, then, you can trust me, I will do my best to ensure that your superiors at Langley also refrain from awarding you the Distinguished Service Cross ". All. Let me out of this kennel.

"One more minute," I asked, "so that you don't complain about me that I, without any good reason, violated the rules of conspiracy on the contacts of legal residents with

illegal, tell me how and where are you going to meet Coyote?

He started.

"It was necessary to start with this, and not to fool me with your worries about the safety of local Jews. I'm not going to date him and I don't advise you to. Have you come here to meet him? Did he call you?

"I don't know," I replied. - Seems to be yes.

"Then you will meet," Yitzhak said with conviction. - You can't dodge. You can trust me.

- Who is he? I asked.

"It all depends on one's worldview," Ben-Zvi shrugged. - Are you an atheist?

"Compared to you, of course. "I was terribly tempted to smoke, but smoking was not allowed in this room.

"Then you can assume that this is a plumber who appears where the sewer has burst," Ben-Zvi laughed.

"However, for a long time he was going to," I rather didn't say, but I thought aloud.

Yitzhak raised his eyes to the ceiling, letting me know that the ways of the Lord are inscrutable.

- Did you come to meet him? I asked bluntly.

"Yes," he answered simply. "But I'm not sure I can do anything. We're monitoring these guys very closely as much as we can. At some point in our childhood, we even tried to kidnap some of them and bring them to Jerusalem, like Eichmann.

- And what are the results? I asked, popping an unlit cigarette into my mouth.

"You can imagine," Ben-Zvi smiled. "The results were amazing. It's good that no one died. But some were captured and imprisoned by local authorities. It is because of our efforts that for some reason they began to be considered somehow connected with the Palestinian terrorists.

- And none of them, - I was surprised, - did not visit the heart of the earth - Jerusalem?

"According to our information, no," Yitzhak spread his hands. "Some believe they started running around this region. But it's damn important for us to finish at least one of them. After the loss of the ark, this is simply necessary. I will do my best to find him. I didn't know that you tracked him too, otherwise I would have met with you on my own initiative. Do you know where he is? Although, of course, the question is idiotic.

"I guess," I replied. - It seems that it was he who called me here, to Petersburg. Listen, Yitzhak, I don't have as many questions for him, of course, as you and your people, I would even say that I don't have any questions for him at all, but only an order to catch a terrorist named Coyote, but if I his meeting, then I will ask him your main question. What is he?

Ben-Zvi hesitated for a moment, then said, not very confidently:

"Ask him when the connection is restored. Communication interrupted 2000 years ago?

- Between whom and whom? I didn't understand.

"Between us and the metropolis unknown to us!" he almost screamed. - Between a small detachment that has been fighting in the environment for 3000 years and the command, which promised reinforcements, but never sent!

"Maybe the survival test period hasn't passed yet?" I asked, more and more surprised. "We went through this test individually. You are in the forests of northern Canada, and for some reason I am in the jungles of Vietnam. I wandered through the jungle for six months. I did not have not only a walkie-talkie for communication, but even simple matches. This was the condition of the game: do you fit the chosen profession or not? Maybe you're worrying for nothing? It's just that the term has not yet ended if the command has thrown you to survive?

"If you go by that analogy," Ben-Zvi said, calming down, "then you were dropped from a helicopter over the jungle into a completely hostile environment. Nature, insects, snakes, animals and Viet Cong with machine guns and knives. And you have no weapons, no food, no compass. And you went through this jungle with the task to go to the nearest location of American units, acquiring along the way, as an indispensable condition for testing, cold and firearms, money and much more. It's not for me to tell you. If along the way you fell into a swamp, you were devoured by a python or a tiger, killed by a cobra or shot by partisans, then I would not remember anyone about you, except for your parents who received a notice that you were missing. But you have reached and your trials are over...

"That's where you're wrong," I thought. "They've only just begun."

"...So we too," Yitzhak continued, "want to finally go through the jungle and look for the right direction without a compass. We have restored our country, we have acquired weapons, we control almost half of the world's foreign exchange reserves, but we still cannot reach our own. May be. Coyote is the representative of our command? That is why it is so necessary for us to meet him. I gave you, as they say, a transcript, but you know even without me that we have lived for centuries in the expectation of the Messiah. And we are constantly looking for it.

"Perhaps you should ask him that?" I suggested. - Like, the Jews are interested in when the Messiah will come? Briefly and elegantly encrypted.

What if he doesn't understand? Yitzhak objected. — After all, we ourselves invented the Messiah even after the loss of communication. This is our code. He may not understand it.

"Well, well," I said. He must understand everything. Otherwise, they wouldn't even take him to the headquarters plumber.

I glanced at my watch. Our conversation went on for almost 14 minutes.

"Okay," I got up and went to open the door. It's time to turn around. I will definitely ask him about it. I have become interested myself. If I find out anything, I'll let you know through Crump and his men. If anything happens to me, then you contact Crump yourself. I'll leave an envelope where I'll give you the approximate coordinates of his location. Everything, of course, is very conditional. Explicit traces are always false traces. All goodbye.

We went out into the hall. Crump almost read the petition to the end and said:

"I will hand everything over to the ambassador personally. The ambassador to the United States has not been in Moscow for several months.

"Look, if you don't pass it on," Dmitriev threatened, "it will be bad for you all!"

He went out to his cheering supporters as Crump handed over a colorful petition to me.

"Someday," I thought, "if I'm in Israel, I'll pass this joke on to the Museum of Modern Jewish Art. But what pride is tearing these people apart! They are looking for a connection with God! No more, no less. Even at the Satan's training ground!"

Part 4

Chapter 5

I first saw this book when Colonel Klimov took it out of his safe, weighed it on his hand - the volume was solid - and handed it to me.

I thought that I could not read such a book even in 10 years - it was no less than the "list of topics not subject to disclosure in the open press" - but obediently picked it up and opened it. On the first page was a purple stamp "Top Secret of Special Importance", and below it was a list of persons admitted to the document.

The list began with Andropov's last name, followed by four of his deputies and several heads of the Main Directorates. Not all. Colonel Klimov, and even more so me, was not in the list at all. The text was typed on a typewriter, the ribbon of which was blue. The headline was handwritten in ink, with pretense of calligraphy: "The Five Hundred Years' War." The card of admitted persons contained the signature of only one Andropov. Everyone else either did not see the book, or saw it but did not read it. Most likely, they did not see it at all, because, having received it in their hands, they were obliged to sign. No one can violate the letter of steel instructions for working with top-secret documents, regardless of rank and position.

There was no author's name, and I took the liberty of asking Klimov who wrote this tome.

The Colonel smacked his plump lips.

- He was so smart. We issued him the 64th through the 15th for fifteen, - the colonel laughed at the resulting pun. - About two months ago he died in the zone. We assigned him such a zone where they don't live for a long time with any term,

Any historian? I asked, not knowing why I was interested. Most likely, because of the latent unwillingness to read this work.

Klimov paused, looked at me, as if asking: "What do you care?", but then, closing the safe, in his usual half-joking manner answered:

To be honest, I don't know who the author is. We found the book during a search of one of our employees. He was already retired, but during his service he collected a lot of fried information and slowly passed this information to Western newspapers. For money, of course. He assured that he received this book from some of his former sources, who had left for permanent residence in Israel. He gave a surname, but the check did not give anything, especially since the source, according to him, did not live in Moscow. We were looking for a typewriter. typewriter,

as you can see from the font, old. Experts believed that this was almost a pre-revolutionary German typewriter of the Continental brand. Hundreds of such machines came to our country during the war years. They stood in almost every German headquarters armored personnel carrier. But we started looking and, imagine, found this particular machine. You never know where. In the Central Committee of the CPSU, on Staraya Square. They have something like a military glory museum there. There this machine is standing with a tag that it is a machine from the secretariat of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. And the ribbon is blue. Now almost no one produces blue ribbons. We checked: the tape is clean. Everyone assures that no one dared to use this machine since 1926, when it was transferred to the museum on the personal order of Comrade Stalin. All this was very romantic, if there was no year of manufacture on the typewriter. And this year is 1937. But the book is exactly on this typewriter and printed. Our detainee has never been in the building of the Central Committee. We wanted to start a new investigation, but he took it and died in the zone. So the author is unknown. Or, if you like, the authors. I personally tend to think that this is the collective work of several people

The Colonel hesitated, but finished:

- ... from the apparatus of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

I almost jumped in my chair.

"What did you say, Comrade Colonel?" From the apparatus of the Central Committee?

"As I heard," Klimov chuckled. I don't understand why you're so surprised. For the last twenty or thirty years, professional party workers have been forged in the history departments of various universities. Ninety-five percent go through the training without assimilating anything except the materials of the last party congresses. But some take their studies seriously. So much so that, in addition to the mandatory course of lectures, they go to libraries and even break into special funds. We tracked such people and took measures so that they never got higher than shop party committees. But follow everyone! Wrote this piece, of course, some technical workers, small fry. But Eremeev correctly believes that without the patronage of very big people, no one in the Central Committee would have dared to do such work on the "Lenin machine." And if such documents are born in the bowels of the Central Committee, then this in itself is very interesting, to say the least. Eremeev correctly believes that the main thing is not to look for authors, but to trace trends.

I understood very poorly what it means "not to look for authors, but to trace trends." Perhaps because he thought of something else. In our business, it is simply forbidden to ask questions to superiors that are not related to the essence of the assignment you have received. You can fly out of the service for a sweet soul for excessive curiosity. But since Klimov and I had a rather strange relationship, if you look at them from the point of view of all kinds of instructions and charters that determine the relationship between superiors and subordinates, I dared to ask:

— Comrade Colonel, can you resolve the issue?

Apparently, Klimov did not like my official tone, because he muttered with displeasure:

- What do you want?

- Who is this Yeremeev? Does he work for us?

"With us," Klimov shot me a furtive glance.

If Klimov answered me more or less complacently, I would certainly ask if Eremeev works in the public and legal department of the Central Committee or, what's good, in the famous (and

semi-legal) division "Z" under the Administration of the Central Committee. But I sensed the colonel's mood and bit my tongue, regretting that I had even asked about Yeremeyev.

"That's what you are," said Klimov. "Go to the hotel, read the book and report your opinion. There is still work to be done with this book. You will report your opinion about the content and about the authors: what they wanted to say and what they are trying to prepare us for. You are a specialist in anti-Soviet literature, and your opinion is interesting to know to the leadership.

"Sure," I replied. "But how can I take her to a hotel?" She's "secret".

"Well, I probably know what I'm talking about," the colonel got angry. - Since I said "take it", then take it and don't think about anything. Three days free. Read. Don't leave the hotel, don't leave the book in plain sight, and certainly don't show it to anyone. Sit and read. While all. Go.

"And I don't have to sign anywhere for top-secret material?" - I asked not at all out of perseverance, but rather because of the triggered instinct of self-preservation.

Klimov silently pointed to the door with his eyes.

I left, realizing that I was in an idiotic position. According to all the rules, I did not want to take this book and even open it until my name is officially included in the number of persons admitted to this material. After the proposal to take this book out of the "diplomat" from the Office, I had to officially refuse, and if ordered to do just that, go to the special department, hand over the book there and report all the circumstances of the case. Then Klimov and I, having handed over the certificates, had to wait for the decision, or, better, the court of the Special Commission, which, at best, would have dismissed both of us from the bodies, and at worst, brought us to criminal liability under a whole constellation of articles of the law and various by-laws and secret instructions.

But after my unauthorized trip to Dubrovo, I could no longer bring myself to do so. However, on the other hand, the following could well happen: I will now be stopped at the checkpoint and asked to open a "diplomat". All my stories that Colonel Klimov gave me the book will only cause wry smiles. Klimov himself, of course, will not confirm anything. And this (an attempt to remove top-secret materials from the Office) smells no longer just of dismissal from the authorities, but of a full-fledged camp term (if signs of treason to the Motherland are not proven), or even execution. there will be not an "attempt to take out", but "the removal of secret materials", and I will never be able to prove that I did not acquaint anyone with these materials, did not make copies of them, etc.) and take me with her in the city.

Something like this was done with Lieutenant Colonel Bondarenko, in whose case Ereemeev was clearly involved. Now they want to do the same with me? Such thoughts swirled feverishly in my head as I walked down the long corridors of the Office towards the checkpoint, trying to appear completely calm and not paying attention to the TV cameras watching from all sides.

Nothing happened at the checkpoint, and I ended up on Dzerzhinsky Square. And then I remembered that Klimov had not said anything about the car. So I have to carry these materials on public transport. My legs became brittle, my head was on fire. In every passerby, I imagined a person who was ordered to seize me. I tried to calm down and even simulate where I myself would order to take myself in such an environment. Of course, I would let "myself" get out of the Office, wait for transport (in this case, a trolley bus) and ... No, not in a trolley bus, but at the exit from it. Or rather, on the way from the trolley bus to the checkpoint of our special hotel. Or is it better in the hotel itself? Or on the way back to the Office? After three days.

This is a very nasty feeling when you realize that you have fallen into a trap and you yourself are no longer able to do anything to get out of it. It all depends on who first appears near the mousetrap: the one who wants to eat you, or the one who wants to play with you a little more?

I do not remember how I got into the trolleybus and how I got off it. I only remember how convulsively I squeezed the "diplomat's" pen. And on the way to the hotel in front of me, as if out of the ground, two people grew up. Hefty guys and, as I probably thought with fear, with a good professional bearing.

"Comrade," one of them said. - Excuse me, please, can you help us push the car, it won't start, if it's wrong!

I was thrown into a fever.

"No," I answered firmly. - I can not. I'm in a hurry. Sorry.

"Yes, it's a matter of a minute," one of them began, but I bypassed him and quickly went to the hotel, accompanied by the booming beats of my heart.

Those two did not follow me, but, indeed, went to some car parked on the opposite side of the street.

I looked at them through the windows of the hotel lobby and saw how they got into the car, started it and drove away. Not pushing or pushing.

I finally got to my room, locked myself in and got that damned book out...

Now, many years later, I understand that it was a test. And the book was a "doll", not top-secret material. I was checked long and hard. Dubrovo (I mean my crazy trip there) was also a test. Both checks gave a negative result, it seems to me, but "a minus times a minus makes a plus." To be honest, they added up and multiplied all my minuses, which I saw well in myself. At least most of them.

In the global game they conceived, performers were needed who, in the name of a quick career, could give up not even principles (now I understand that by the atom of time no one had any principles left), but the unshakable rules of service discipline. By agreeing to take the book and take it out of the Directorate, I, an investigating officer of the KGB, showed that in the name of the goodwill of Colonel Klimov I was ready to commit the most flagrant violation of the regime and discipline. In other words, he showed a willingness to do anything for a career. It was then that the thieves at the top realized that I could be entrusted with any job, including the destruction of my own country. Now it is obvious to me, the general, but then I opened the top-secret book with excitement and impatience.

By the way, looking ahead, I want to note that this book did not contain anything "top secret" or even "secret". For the most part, the material contained in it can be considered completely open. Anyone interested in the issue could find the necessary sources absolutely freely.

Partly the book was drawn to "special storage", partly to "anti-Soviet literature". In general, the presented material presented, without a doubt, a terrible picture. The conclusions made by the author or authors could be considered top secret with some stretch, but only to the extent that the delirium of a madman can be considered "secret". If such a book had come across to me in the course of some investigation entrusted to me, I would have led the author through the usual 70th article (part 1) or put him in a special psychiatric hospital. Most likely the latter, since the conclusion drawn in this book stated that our country is

the mighty nuclear superpower, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, is dead. She died, unable to bear what had befallen her in the past 500 years, and especially in the last 70, although seventy years had not passed yet. She died in 1978. The unknown author assured that even the date of death could be calculated, but he would not do this, since the process of calculating several thousand parameters would take a long time, and besides, no one needs to know the day of death of the country, it is enough to know the year.

I confess that the first thing I read these conclusions, and they had a depressing effect on me. If I had come across this book during some search, I would have firmly decided that this was another nonsense of some too impressionable anti-Soviet who had heard enough of the broadcasts of Radio Liberty. But the fact that I received it from Colonel Klimov with a hint that this book came from the bowels of the Central Committee of the CPSU made all this feel much more acutely. I even went to the window to make sure that the capital of our Motherland, Moscow, is alive and bustling with activity. Outside the window, a stream of cars was going along Dmitrovskoye Highway, trolleybuses were sparkling, traffic police cars and ambulances were flashing blue lights, people were scurrying back and forth about their business. Signboards of shops shone, and over the roofs of houses the slogan "The people and the party are united" glowed in neon.

I turned on the TV. They broadcast the program "Time". The confident, modulated baritone of the presenter, familiar from early childhood, poured from the blue screen: "The fourth power unit has been put under load ... The builders pledged to achieve another high performance in honor of the XXV Congress of the CPSU ... Field workers began ... In Kabul, servicemen of a limited contingent of Soviet troops planted 380 trees on Friendship Alley... At the UN, Comrade Gromyko sharply condemned the provocations of the American and Israeli military against the freedom-loving people of Libya."

I turned off the TV and sighed. In his conclusions, the author regarded the invasion of our troops into Afghanistan as a convulsion of a dead man trying to prove to the world that he is still alive. But, in fact, the author pointed out, it was this invasion that showed the world that the dangerous psychopath, who had been waving a razor at the throat of all mankind for more than half a century, had finally died. It is good that his dying convulsions were directed to the wild mountains, gorges and deserts of a relatively sparsely populated region of the planet.

That's it! Knowing the author's conclusions, no matter how stunning they may be, I even felt an interest to know how the author came to these conclusions.

As expected, the book opened with an introduction, in which the author pointed out that this work could well be called the "Thousand Years' War", but due to the poor documentation and strong legend of the history of Ancient Russia, it is difficult to trace even the main socio-political processes in the territories of various entities, conditionally called "principalities". However, it seems obvious that the "war of all against all" was already raging even before the period of the invasion of the Tatar-Mongols. This war broke out, according to the author, immediately after the creation of the rudiments of what the historians of the future called "Russian statehood". Apparently, he suggests, the essence of the problem lay in the very form of the creation of the Rurikovich state, since very few documents, mostly foreign, have survived, and the Tale of Bygone Years is a fake from beginning to end, written several centuries after these events with the main goal of proving the legitimacy of some regular scoundrels who seized power, whom, apparently, no one had ever seen before and did not know where they came from with their gang of marauders, then this entire period is a period of historical assumptions and assumptions. But since it must fit in with a later and already fairly well-documented period, it can be more likely to assume what happened in those distant years in the European part of the present Soviet Union.

In the VI-VIII centuries AD, without a doubt, the leading power in the economic and military

relation was Byzantium. By the standards of that time, Byzantium could be called the "superpower" of the early Middle Ages. Its military might was undeniable, and its economic dominance unrivaled. The most precious product of the then world export was silk, produced by China and delivered to Europe along the famous Great Silk Road. During this period, Byzantine scouts carried out a very complex and dangerous operation, as a result of which the silkworm was stolen in China and taken to Byzantium, where they managed to breed it. As a result, from the main dealer of silk, Byzantium turned into its major producer, which further strengthened its economic power. Yes, and political to a large extent, because silk in those years was the equivalent of gold.

At the same time, for reasons not yet fully clarified, the Scandinavian fiords threw out whole hordes of Normans - warlike and merciless - onto the newborn, still embryonic Europe. Like a tornado, the Vikings swept on their high-speed boats and horses around and across Europe, trampling entire kingdoms and duchies into the darkness of history. "God! Save us from the Normans," they prayed in all the churches of the continent.

No one had time to come to their senses, as the kingdom of the Normans arose already in Sicily in the immediate vicinity of the Byzantine metropolis, where the violent Scandinavians slightly took a breath. Anyone who thinks that the Normans-Vikings-Varangians (whatever you want to call them) were shaggy bandits who enjoy slaughter, murder, the clanging of swords and the magnificent view of burning cities are mistaken. Not at all. They were robbers who knew very well what they wanted. They wanted money and power. Having plundered money, they bought power with it, and having seized power somewhere, they made money on it. In other words, these bandit formations can be called well-organized interstate mafia structures that have created an almost modern system of supranational racketeering, which, if somehow changed by now, is only in the direction of more advanced technical means to achieve the desired results and, perhaps, more sophisticated terminology. .

So, having taken a breath in their Sicilian kingdom, the Normans turned to Byzantium with an exquisite commercial offer, the essence of which was as follows: they, that is, the Normans, would henceforth buy all silk from Byzantium in bulk (at wholesale prices), and then resell the Byzantine customers, taking over and regulating the market. If Byzantium agrees to this, then they, the Normans, will refrain from invading the territory of the Empire, and Byzantium will be able to avoid the fate of most European countries, the miserable fate of which (due to the greed of local rulers) can serve as an excellent and substantive example.

Byzantium agreed. Of course, one can very much argue how the Norman invasion of the territory of the then superpower would have ended, but the government of the Empire, whose subjects enjoyed the then highest standard of living, did not want to put their lives and property at risk from a fairly powerful and daring terrorist organization that had already managed to show off your skills in a great and effective way. Moreover, most of the armed forces of the Empire were on the eastern borders, conducting endless "peacekeeping" operations with militant nomads who did not want to recognize the authority of the Constantinople government and prevented them from pushing the boundaries of the Empire towards the endless and fabulously rich East. The eastern expansion of Byzantium, which was very expensive and eventually (after half a millennium) destroyed the great Empire, forced the proud Constantinople to agree to the conditions of the Normans.

However, not only is happiness never permanent, but it is rarely even lasting. The sudden emergence among the hot deserts of the Arabian Peninsula of another world religion - Islam and on its wave of a powerful, dynamic and

The aggressive Arab caliphate put an end to the quiet existence of the Normans and the intermediary company for the resale of silk.

With the swiftness of the Samum, the Arab cavalry cleared the coast of North Africa from all competitors, swept the Normans from Sicily and Crete, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, crossed the Pyrenees and invaded France. A powerful fleet of caliphs appeared near Constantinople, drawing Byzantium into a long and bloody war, which forced the Norman racket to be temporarily forgotten.

And absolutely in vain!

The energy of the Norman conquests subsided, but not so much as to fade completely. Some were content with various third-rate royal and ducal crowns, moving, as they say, to a settled life at the expense of not very rich tributaries, but the main fighting backbone of the once invincible militants (or squads, if you like) was not at all inclined to come to terms with circumstances and calm down.

Moreover, money was needed more than ever!

Even more offensive was the fact that Byzantium owed the "Varangians" a very large amount at that time and, judging by many signs, was not going to pay. The "representatives of the mediator" sent to Constantinople with copies of the contracts, properly drawn up, either returned with nothing, except for vague promises that no one was obviously going to fulfill, or did not return at all, disappearing forever in the terrible Byzantine underground prisons. And some returned blinded (with their eyes gouged out).

It was in this way that Byzantium showed its annoyance at "unreasonable commercial harassment."

It became clear that if Byzantium was not influenced by the methods of "direct racketeering", then nothing would be achieved.

But how to do that?

The Eastern Mediterranean was closed to navigation, representing a continuous war zone between the Byzantine and Arab fleets. This, perhaps, would not have embarrassed the Normans, but all the bases from which they could reach Byzantium were also lost.

But the sea wanderers, hardened by fate, unlike many others in the world of that time, also knew geography well. From time immemorial, they knew that if you leave your native fiords into the open sea and turn not to sunset, but to sunrise, then you can, having passed through the labyrinths of rivers and lakes, dragging your battle boats through numerous shoals and rifts along the banks overgrown with impenetrable forests, go out to the great sea, on the opposite bank of which lies the hated Constantinople. The path is difficult and dangerous: arrows and spears can rain down from the coastal thickets, and on the rifts, where the forest gradually turns into the great steppe, violent nomads on undersized horses can walk in a black cloud over the boats, leaving behind only corpses and charred boats.

Not everyone was ready to follow this path, later called "the path from the Varangians to the Greeks."

But there was no other choice.

Went!

And in July 866, 400 combat boats of the Normans, breaking into the Bosphorus, unexpectedly

surrounded the capital of the great Empire. History, stylized to the limit, has preserved for us the semi-legendary names of the leaders of the daring and sudden raid: Rurik, Askold and Dir. The Byzantines were completely taken by surprise when they saw the creditors of the waters of the walls of their capital. Their surprise was so strong that it raises very serious doubts about the assertions of historians that someone used this path before. Taking advantage of the fact that the main forces of the Byzantine fleet fought with the Arabs far to the south, the Normans landed troops, betraying the surroundings of Constantinople to the sword, fire and plunder. Orthodox monasteries and representatives of the clergy were destroyed with particular cruelty. It was impossible to take Constantinople itself without siege engines, but it was not necessary either. A representative was sent to the fortress with trade agreements yellowed from time to time.

Having received the bills, confirming their rights as intermediaries and loading the boats with silk and other oriental goods, the Normans set off on the return journey. No matter how difficult this path was, the Eastern Mediterranean, closed to navigation, made it not only profitable, but also exclusive. And yet this path did not belong to the Normans. Along its entire length: along the shores of the Gulf of Finland, the Neva, Lake Ladoga, Volkhov, Ilmen and the Dnieper, people lived, probably united in some form of statehood. We know almost nothing about them: history has preserved absolutely nothing, and epics and archeology - regrettably little.

These people were very kind and spontaneous. They did not demand anything from the ferocious northern robbers for the passage through their territories. Of course, the Normans would not have paid anything and, as was their custom, would have tried to force their way through the force of arms. But there is no mention that they had to do this or pay any trade or customs duties. Moreover, they widely used the hospitality of the local population, its help in loading, unloading and dragging, in the construction of trading yards, which in the future were called Novgorod and Kyiv. There is a lot of evidence that the locals helped the newcomers a lot, but not a single one - that someone paid them for this or that they somehow participated in the profits.

This was such a simple and ingenuously kind people who lived at a time when already in the West for every kilometer of the road, for the passage of any river or strait, merchants had to pay money and a lot. And he let the Norman bands through his territories, selflessly helping them and even sympathized: wow! So tormented and so killed because of some yellow mugs with incomprehensible signs and profiles on them. And it was not the naivety of the Papuans at the sight of glass beads, it was the reaction of the people, who stood spiritually above all the civilization around them at that time, who had other values and other standards. And the social system there, apparently, was quite different.

Almost nothing has been preserved about this forest people. Sharp-sighted and meticulous Arab and Chinese historians, if we discard all the fairy tales and fables that are inevitable in the works of that time, argue that this people was very numerous, the men were heroes, and the women were tall and beautiful beauties. The people lived along the banks of forest rivers in cities and villages, lived by hunting, fishing, knew crafts, raised cattle and poultry. He was kind and hospitable. But the most surprising thing was that he had a socio-political system that was completely incomprehensible to his contemporaries.

"This people had no kings, no khans, no emirs, no princes, no leaders. All were equal and ruled together."

It is already difficult for us to believe it, but some unknown, but extremely effective form of democracy existed there. Not ambitious, not aggressive, but aimed solely at prosperity. In fact, there were plenty of settlements and villages and, judging by the research of archaeologists, they existed for at least a thousand years before the events described. But not a single (!) cataclysm was noted in those places.

In the years when everyone was slaughtering and killing each other, when invasions gave way to invasions, when the ringing of swords and the whistling of arrows did not stop for a second, everything was quiet and calm in this region.

Shut up, they tell us. Nobody could get there. Okay, we agree. And among themselves? After all, the main blood then flowed in the early feudal civil strife. And the reasons were not at all global: for a meadow, for arable land, for a piece of the coast, for a fork in the road, for an aunt's scrap on a slope. And then nothing happened, otherwise it would not have gone unnoticed. Forests would burn along with cities and towns engulfed in war, masses of people would flee to escape the victor, rivers would throw corpses into the southern estuaries, and the inevitable famine in these cases would lead to a mass exodus from these places and the winners and the vanquished. Soon all this will begin to happen here: cities and forests will burn, terrified people will rush headlong wherever their eyes look, and rivers will throw hundreds of corpses into the southern seas.

But all this will happen in the future, when it starts

Great War .

The Normans immediately took note of the uniqueness of the people, surrounded by whom they had to do their complex and dangerous business with no less cunning and cruel Byzantines. We took note of the kindness, simplicity and non-aggression of the people, who in the future will be called Russian. And they quickly realized that if they weren't charged anything for the passage of armed convoys, if they didn't ask anything for help in loading and unloading and construction work, for a meal and lodging for the night, then why not demand tribute from these fools for the honor of participating in international trade? racketeering.

And they imposed tribute on their good masters, starting, in other words, a racket within a racket. This people, truly the people of God, had no money, gold and precious stones. But there were beautiful furs of unprecedentedly precious dressing, leather and morocco products, canvases of amazing quality and beauty, clothes with fine dressing, carved wooden jewelry of unprecedented elegance, unsurpassed examples of forging, including hunting weapons. (But there was no combat. Apparently, for many generations no one fought with anyone. And for many centuries later, the ax will remain the most popular and popular weapon - a peaceful tool for carpenters and carpenters.) And how much food was there: honey (and mountains of wax), a bird , meat, vegetables, which the Normans not only tried, but had never seen before. They lived from hand to mouth, for months on salted and dried fish they vegetated in their campaigns. And here's just how much.

The people lived peacefully, happily and richly. And no one, at first glance, was not controlled. In addition, there were local residents and excellent sailors. On their boats, faster and more suitable for navigation along river routes than the ocean boats of the Normans, they kept in touch with numerous settlements in the vast territory of the present North-West and Central Russia. They conducted barter trade, traveled, often by entire villages, to visit each other, organized mass hunts for animals, very reminiscent of today's sports and concert festivals. That is why the people themselves were seen as the main value: hardworking, peaceful and kind. The perverted morality of the invaders immediately told the Normans: these are the qualities of an ideal slave.

It was a global political mistake.

At first, the locals did not even understand that they were being taxed. Out of their kindness and simplicity, they carried to the newcomers on the boats what they asked for (and they no longer "asked", but demanded): furs, linen, honey, food and drink. There was plenty of everything - nothing is a pity for dear guests. And how it was possible to sell all this profitably both in Constantinople and in other overseas

cities - none of them had a clue.

The Normans increased tribute. And they carried it again - with joy, kindness and jokes. And the overloaded combat boats left up and down the rivers. But things with Byzantium went from bad to worse. Wholesale prices for silk could not be brought down. I had to resort to "direct action" again. But there was a hitch. Several fleets of Igor - the son of Rurik - were destroyed by the fleet of the Emperor, who used a military novelty - Greek fire, the existence of which the Normans had not even heard of. Igor himself miraculously escaped with the remnants of the defeated fleet.

There were no profits, and the losses were enormous, as always happens after the failure of "direct action" in racketeering. There is nothing to say about moral damages. The gang looked askance at their bankrupt leader. Neither Rurik, nor Oleg, nor Igor, of course, no one considered princes, including themselves. They were promoted to princes by chronicles written 300 years later, or even later. They were simple leaders of robber bands operating on foreign territory, having accepted the hospitality of the local population almost for the right of extraterritoriality.

It was possible to partially cover the losses only by once again taking tribute from local simpletons, whom the historians of the future would call Drevlyans.

The simpletons, at the sight of their old acquaintances emaciated and scorched by Greek fire, brought them from the heart everything they needed: skins, and honey, and resin, and leather, as well as a lot of food. No matter how much there was, it was impossible to cover the losses from an unsuccessful racket.

Then the illiterate Norman Igor, a shaggy bearded man in a horned helmet, came up with the same brilliant idea that a thousand years later came to the head of the leader of the world proletariat: to conduct a surplus appraisal together with an industrial appraisal.

The simpletons-Drevlyans at first did not understand what they wanted from them. They were told that they had to hand over the stocks of all their cellars and barns to the last speck of dust, all furs and skins, and in addition to give every second woman, both for the delight of their acquired masters, and for sale in slave markets (a commodity, sometimes not inferior to at the price of silk). When they understood, then, of course, they flatly refused to fulfill such impudent demands of their guests. They thought they were guests. Guests have long considered them their property - more valuable than fur and honey, hardworking, rustic and peaceful slaves. Outraged by their refusal to be voluntarily robbed to the bone, the Normans took to their swords in the only way they knew how to settle the dispute. But they clearly overestimated the strength of their charm and their arguments, as well as the strength of their swords, since almost all were killed, and captured Igor was torn apart by trees. This capital punishment was previously applied exclusively to predatory and greedy wolves, who killed a hundred times more livestock in the herd than they could eat.

It is possible that the Normans, indeed, were not very good at verbally persuading their opponents, but we must give them their due - they knew how to fight, not sparing either themselves, let alone the enemy.

And cities and settlements burned, and full-flowing rivers carried hundreds of corpses into the seas, and man and beast fled from the burning forests.

In the dynamics of their trade and intermediary operations with Byzantium, it was once all for the Varangians to occupy the territories that they, without the knowledge of the local population, de facto considered their own. But now this time has come. Things with Byzantium are clearly coming to an end. The first crusade opened up the Eastern Mediterranean for European trade, making the route from the "Varangians to the Greeks" completely unprofitable. There was no longer the strength to force Byzantium to continue to recognize the Normans as the only wholesale buyers. The last attempt, made in 1043, ended with another defeat of the Norman fleet,

burned almost to the last ship by Greek fire. I had to think about what to do next.

There was no longer the strength to return to the Mediterranean Sea, and the means too. In Europe, no one expected them, and it was both shameful and fearful to arrange a showdown with their close and distant relatives who divided various European crowns. It was cold and boring in the native fjords, and no one was waiting for them there either. Rather, on the contrary: whole fleets, bending the oars and driven by steady western winds, went towards them - to the Volkhov and the Dnieper, in order to take part in the seizure of new, fabulous lands, lands that did not belong to anyone, and, no doubt, bequeathed to them as "earthly Grail" by their harsh gods Odin and Thor.

Taken by surprise by this monstrous and unprecedented aggression of the mafia-intermediary structures against the true owners of the territory they rented, the local population began to resist fiercely.

The resistance, which, although growing stronger every day, was unfortunately poorly organized. The locals did not have that, militaristic but in essence, civilization, which for many reasons was created in the West and South of Europe. Organizationally, the Varangians, of course, were much stronger, since they were militant units militarized to the limit with a clear system of subordination, which is so important in military affairs. Without a doubt, they surpassed the local population both in terms of combat training and in terms of psychological preparation. Burning a rebellious village and killing its inhabitants to the last man, and slaughtering the captives as a sacrifice to their warlike gods was a common thing for them. But not for the enemy. The Drevlyans tried for a long time to solve the problem through negotiations, they were deceived, lured into traps, treacherously exterminating those few who tried to organize organized resistance to the invaders. The names of the legendary prince Mal and a handful of his comrades look at us like misty ghosts from the darkness of ages. They look with reproach - after all, we not only know nothing about them, but we don't even know that they existed. The cruelest war, which was destined to never end, flared up every day, every year, every ten years, sometimes taking on the most incredible and bizarre forms.

The people have not forgotten the treachery of the aliens. He did not accept the statehood imposed on him according to an alien model, instinctively striving to return to the so-called order. "pre-Varyazh period".

The people fought fiercely and courageously. Reinforcements from northern and central Europe came to the aid of the Varangians. A powerful foreign army, with sword and fire, cleared the foundation for the construction of a new state, which later received the name RUSSIA.

For at least 60 years after the death of "prince" Igor from his own greed, hostilities continued uninterruptedly. The people did not win this fight. He was very kind at heart and not at all belligerent. The escape routes to the south were cut off, but even if they managed to break through, the prospect of meeting with the Khazars or the Pechenegs did not bode well either. Only the path to the north was open, through windbreaks and impenetrable forest thickets. Masses of people removed from the burnt settlements and went farther and farther into the forests, closer to the icy seas and permafrost. They will be caught up there too, but much later. Some of their villages, even now, can only be reached by helicopter, and many are still unknown. Not in the Siberian taiga, but here, on the European territory of Russia.

But, of course, not everyone was able to leave. Most continued to fight, died, were captured, slaughtered (sometimes several thousand people at a time) on sacrificial altars, turned into slaves, sold further south or left for heavy

works. Some (and there are always such people everywhere) were accepted into squads, flattered by a lot, or maybe just taking pity on their wives and youngsters.

And, of course, the inevitable happened. The leaders and leaders of various gangs and detachments of militants - motley, multi-tribal, with different levels of discipline and combat training, but distinguished by almost the same ferocity and greed, who needed to "explore" new territories - certainly had to grapple with each other, for a single command they, if at all, existed, then only in theory.

So it happened pretty quickly.

A war of all against all began, the situation got out of control, swirling in a steep whirlwind of chaos. Any "prince" (we will use the generally accepted terminology) who led his militants against yesterday's comrades in arms had the sense to try to win over the local residents to his side with false explanations that he was fighting for their trampled rights. In such a situation, any of his inner circle would be tempted to slaughter his commander, to make an alliance with the opposing gang in order to attack some third competitor together. From the south, the Polovtsians and Khazars were propped up, whom they also tried to use, both as allies and as a common enemy for a temporary unification.

The "showdown" with Byzantium has long been forgotten. On the contrary, they called out to her for help. Byzantium offered to use the centuries-old ideology of Eastern Christianity, which, with luck, could, having destroyed pagan immorality with its ten commandments, unite everyone under two fundamental slogans: "All power is from God" and "Slaves, obey your masters."

But Christianity did little to help. And the newly-appeared Christians, kissing the cross, managed to slaughter a competitor with the other hand, continuing to wage a global war against a people that they already considered their own. What measures were not taken even then to unite the Normans who had been conquered around, who had already forgotten their native language and were completely absorbed by the more cultural local environment, but continued to consider themselves an elite born to command. Raids of nomads from the steppe were provoked, endless campaigns against the Khazars were organized, but nothing worked, because everyone constantly broke down into a showdown with each other.

The Byzantine clergy also tried to restore order in this hornet's nest, acting according to long-established ideological methods. The first monasteries created on the territory occupied by the Normans, which can be considered if not the first universities, then certainly the first ideological departments of local authorities, about 200 years after the events described, issued the so-called "Tale of Bygone Years", where, without any twinge of conscience, it was said that the local the residents, who are completely incapable of anything on their own, and even more so of state administration, invited the "Varangians" themselves: they say, rule over us - "our country is big - only there is no order."

Such a gross falsification, if it gave food for thought to the historians of the future, and gave Comrade Stalin a pretext for the destruction of historical science as such, made very little impression on contemporaries. The war continued. For the military-political elite that had already taken shape, it was completely clear that the people that had come into its possession should be deprived of all freedoms and all rights. Only then can they be controlled somehow. They did not yet know that they were, as Comrade Brezhnev figuratively put it at the 25th Congress of the CPSU, in the "zone of risky farming", where one grain thrown into the ground - one and you get. Two at best. The conclusion was obvious: if you give this people freedom and rights, then you will immediately be killed. But even if for some reason this does not happen, then one way or another you will die of hunger, since the farmer is not in

able (even in the presence of all rights) to ensure a well-fed existence for you and yourself. So, there's nothing to be done: he must be a disenfranchised and half-starved slave.

So, in the vast territories of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, an armed trading mafia group tried to put together a new state, which later received the name Kievan Rus, while using the local population as disenfranchised livestock and consumables.

Nothing came of it. Mired in civil strife, which were inevitable due to the unwillingness of the people to reconcile with the invaders, this state collapsed, and the Tatar invasion that soon followed actually destroyed it without a trace.

The Normans went north, recognized the supremacy of the Horde khans, flatteringly called kings, they knew the centuries-old humiliation of the "label" rule, but not the usual relief: now, in case of disobedience on the part of the people, the Tatars were called to pacify. The last one, for the correct and timely receipt of tribute, had to have one responsible in the vassal territories, destroying all his competitors and break opponents. A "label" for a great reign in the form of experience was given to one or another "prince" depending on his devotion to the Horde.

Thus, the Grand Duchy of Moscow was gradually created, from which Muscovite Rus arose as a completely incomprehensible Tatar-Byzantine protectorate. The former exercised military-economic control over the territory, the latter - spiritual and cultural, not interfering with each other at all, but rather helping, although there is no evidence that these actions were coordinated.

The princes of Moscow themselves were left with supervision over their own people, for whose behavior (that is, for the unconditional payment of tribute and complete obedience to the decrees of the occupation and local administration) they bore "strict personal responsibility" to the khan and moral responsibility to Constantinople. Thus, the people, among other things, turned into a source of additional trouble. Not only did the people constantly want to kill, overthrow, destroy you, they could also make it so that the khan could kill you (or, which is the same thing, take away the label), and excommunicate the ecumenical patriarch.

For the sake of honesty, it should be noted that there were also such princes who tried to somehow establish relations and mutual trust with the people. Usually such ms lived for more than a week. As a rule, the people themselves tore such a good-natured man to pieces, recalling the eternal state of war. If the people, due to their centuries of disorganization, did not have time to do this, then the relatives or friends of the prince did it for him, rightly seeing in his flirting with the people nothing more than a suicidal attempt, deadly for them too. Khan also rightly saw in such actions of his vassal proof of his complete official inconsistency, summoned such a person to his Horde and quietly killed him by breaking the ridge.

So life itself (and love for it) forced the princes to create punitive and supervisory services (orders) as the first state institutions, whose task was to supervise the population so that it would not make any attempts to straighten itself out of that ram's horn into which it was bent by the combined efforts of the Varangians, Byzantines and Tatars.

Such institutions immediately received enormous power and privileges, far from always using them for the benefit of their employer. For they also participated in the war, and it had already taken on such intricate forms that not everyone could realize which side he was fighting on.

The war has engulfed everyone both horizontally and vertically. Particularly interesting in this regard is the time of Dmitry Donskoy, Vasily I and Vasily II.

But we will not dwell on them, leaving the readers to figure out for themselves this most interesting era, when Tamerlane, who invaded Rus', turned back, seeing that the country (by its rulers themselves) was devastated to such an extent that it was not possible to go on a campaign against it.
made no sense.

The collapsed Horde and the Byzantine Empire that collapsed into the sea again left the "Rurikoviches" (namely, that's how they called themselves) face to face with their people. There was no support, but there was no responsibility either, experience came and even some self-confidence appeared. It was an illusion, because there were no ways to stop the war by any means. Any complete victory immediately threw the winners to the other side of the front line, and the war broke out with renewed vigor. We will see this below...

Everything I read was already giving me a headache, even though I only skimmed through the introduction. Of course, I am not a specialist historian and the history course that I happened to listen to at the law faculty of the Leningrad State University was mainly devoted to the history of the CPSU, but all the same, what I read seemed to me delirium in delirium tremens. So that something like this could be born in the apparatus of the Central Committee of the CPSU? Where could such "clever men" come from? But, on the other hand, everything I read was so similar to what the deputy chairman of the committee, General Popkov, explained to me when I introduced him to him, that this could not but puzzle. It was after Popkov's visit with me and completely incomprehensible stories began to occur, which so far led to completely incomprehensible relations with the leadership in violation of all existing rules and, more importantly, the unwritten traditions of the Cheka - KGB.

I hid the book in the Diplomat and the Diplomat under the bunk. He made himself coffee. I wanted to call my wife in Leningrad, but changed my mind and began to read the book further, although I did not want to at all. But it was not my whim, but actually the order of Klimov.

The first chapter was entitled "War flares up" and opened with the reign of Ivan the Terrible. The king began with a program statement, which can be considered a formal declaration of war on his subjects.

"Since ancient times," said John Vasilyevich, as if summing up the first five hundred years of the existence of the Russian state, "the Russian people were rebellious to our ancestors, starting from the glorious memory of Vladimir Monomakh, they shed a lot of our blood, they wanted to exterminate our glorious and blessed family ... They prepared such a fate for me, your rightful heir ... and still I see treason with my own eyes; not only with the Polish king, but also with the Turks, and with the Crimean Khan, they enter into co-intention to destroy and exterminate us; they exhausted our meek wife Anastasia Romanovna, and if God had not kept us, revealing their plans, then they would have exhausted us with our children.

Having made such a statement, the king clearly made it clear that he did not intend to put up with such an attitude of the people towards himself and wanted to take the initiative in the blazing war into his own hands. It must be admitted that he acted thoughtfully, creating a methodology for many years to come.

First of all, it was necessary to create a punitive institution, responsible only to the king. During the time of Grozny, Oprichina became such an institution. The rest of Rus' began to be called the Zemshchina. In war, the most important thing is to draw a clear front line between yourself and the enemy.

"Zemshchina," as historians correctly note, "had the meaning of a disgraced land, comprehended by royal anger."

The tsar sat down in the Alexander Sloboda, in a palace surrounded by a rampart and a moat. Ivan lived here surrounded by his favorites, among which the Basmanovs, Malyuta Skuratov and Afanasy Vyazemsky took first place. Favorites recruited nobles and noble children to Oprichina, and instead of the approved staff of 1,000 people, they soon made up for them to 6,000, who were given estates and estates taken from their former owners. The latter were deprived not only of their houses and all movable property, it happened that in winter they were sent on foot to empty lands. Many died along the way. There were more than 12,000 such unfortunate families. The scale, of course, was not yet the same as later, but the methodology had already been laid down for centuries.

"The new landowners," the historian continues, "relying on the special mercy of the tsar, allowed themselves all sorts of arrogance and arbitrariness against the peasants, and soon led them to such a beggarly position that it was smeared as if the enemy had visited these lands."

In war, as in war. In addition to extensive rights, the newly created punitive body, of course, also had duties, mainly for a greater awareness of its privileged position and elitism.

"The guardsmen gave the tsar a special oath, which they pledged not only to inform about everything that they hear bad about the tsar, but not to have any friendly message, not to eat or drink with the zemstvo people (that is, with the population of the country). The courts received instructions for all cases decided in favor of the guardsmen, and they enthusiastically took advantage of this circumstance for personal enrichment, since they thought very little about the fate of the country. Extortions and confiscations began. Many lost their homes, they themselves went into bondage."

"The establishment of the Oprichina was such a monstrous act of demoralization of the Russian people," a contemporary notes, "that even if Satan wanted to invent something for human corruption, he could not invent anything more successful."

However, as already noted, it was not only about the people, because the war penetrated not only the horizontal, but also the vertical. There were mass executions of the nobility, confiscation of estates, exile and, at best, forced monastic tonsure.

The head of state personally led the war against his own people, not disdaining, at times, to do the work of a simple executioner. In the best traditions of their ferocious pagan Norman ancestors.

"Often after dinner, Tsar Ivan went to torture and torment the disgraced. He never lacked them. They were brought in by the hundreds, and many of them were tortured to death before the eyes of the tsar. That was Tsar Ivan's favorite entertainment: after the bloody scenes, he seemed especially cheerful."

Many were tempted to declare Ivan Vasilyevich a schizophrenic. But this is not so at all. He simply waged war with his worst enemy, trying to intimidate him as much as possible and thereby ensure his own existence. The keen eyes of Russian chroniclers and historians quickly saw the essence of state policy towards the people and the country.

"The zemshchina," they note, "was, as it were, a foreign subjugated country, devoted to the arbitrariness of the conquerors."

Occupied country! You better not say.

But there was also a church, which, having gained independence after the collapse of Byzantium, forgot the old ideological guidelines of its teachers and tried to somehow stop the arbitrariness of the authorities in relation to the people.

Metropolitan Philip of Moscow, demonstrating great courage, somehow dared to say to the tsar: "Leave Oprichina! Otherwise, it's impossible for me to be a metropolitan. Your work is not pleasing to God and you will not have our blessing!" The courageous metropolitan did not understand that there was a war going on. The king tried to explain to him: "Lord saint, my people want to devour me." Philip did not agree with the arguments of the monarch and somehow dared to refuse the blessing of the tsar right in the Assumption Cathedral. The noble Lord did not understand that he was already participating in the war, demonstrating unprecedented heroism. Captured right in the church by Basmanov, beaten to the point of losing consciousness, the head of the church was thrown into prison. By order of the king, he was beaten into yogis in wooden blocks, and his hands into iron shackles and starved. The only relative of the Metropolitan, Ivan Kolychev, was beheaded and thrown into a pit where the head of the Russian Orthodox Church languished, nominally a person.

Having ordered Philip to be strangled in a dungeon without too much noise, Ivan dealt with his cousin Vladimir Andreevich, killing him along with his wife. Vladimir could well become a banner in the war and organize some kind of mess with claims to the throne. Whether he wanted it or not, no one found out, but it was better to play it safe.

"Constant horror, every minute fear for his life more and more seized the king. He was convinced that there were many enemies and betrayals of the Incas around him, but he was unable to find them. He was ready to exterminate almost the entire Russian people en masse, then run away from him to foreign lands. He no longer believed his guardsmen, and their end was near.

This was also a technique - the top of the punitive apparatus should not live long, because all terror must and must be attributed to it. At the same time, just in case, as the wise John would teach the future rulers of Russia, one must always be ready to flee abroad, because no one knows what can be expected from the local population.

Ivan himself was inclined to flee to England. He frankly wrote to Queen Elizabeth of England that the traitors were conspiring against him, conspiring with neighbors hostile to him, wanting to exterminate him and his entire family. (Ioann himself killed his son Ivan, a fierce guardsman, just in case, because he had a denunciation of his growing popularity. In Russia, it is very dangerous when a son's rating exceeds that of his father.)

Ivan asked the English queen to give him asylum in England. But at the same time, preparing to escape from Russia at any moment, since he was waiting for a retaliatory strike from his people, the tsar conceived and carried out a large-scale action to bring the people into awe, because this state could only exist in this way.

In December 1569, John went on a campaign through his own country. "He went to war," notes a somewhat naive historian of the 19th century, "it was not only a strange, but also an extravagant war with past centuries, a wild revenge on the living for the long dead." For some reason, the historian believed that the war was, but ended, but John knew well that it would never end.

The city of Klin was the first to experience the royal wrath.

"The oprichniki, on the royal orders, broke into the city, beat and killed anyone. Frightened residents, innocent of anything, not understanding what it all means, fled anywhere (to the Pacific Ocean). Then the tsar went to Tver. On the way, everything they ruined and killed everyone they met. Approaching Tver, the tsar ordered to surround the city from all sides. Ivan stood near Tver for five days. First, they robbed all the clergy, starting with the bishop. Ordinary residents thought that this would be the end of the matter, but two days later, after to the royal order, guardsmen

rushed into the city, ran from house to house, killed people, broke all household utensils, smashed windows, cut down gates and doors, took away all household supplies and merchant goods: wax, lei, skins - they brought them to heaps, burned them, and then left. The inhabitants again began to think that this would be the end of the matter, that, having destroyed their property, they would at least be left with their lives, when suddenly the guardsmen again burst into the city and begin to beat anyone: men, women, babies, others are burned with fire, others they tear with ticks, drag and throw the bodies of the dead into the Volga.

Captured Poles and Germans, held in a local prison, are delivered to the river bank and, in the presence of the tsar, they are cut into pieces with axes, throwing the remains under the ice.

From Tver the tsar went to Torzhok, and there the same thing was repeated as was done in Tver. The chronicle records that 1,490 Orthodox people were killed in Torzhok. The local fortress also contained captured Germans and Tatars. "Ivan appeared; first to the Germans, ordered to kill them before his own eyes and calmly enjoyed their torment."

Unarmed Tatars tried to resist. They managed to seriously wound Malyuta Skuratov, kill two guardsmen and almost get the tsar himself. All of them were killed.

From Torzhok Ivan went to Vyshny Volochek, Valdai, Yazhelbitsy. On both sides of the road, guardsmen scattered through the villages, killing people and ruining their property.

Even before the arrival of Ivan himself, his advanced regiment approached Novgorod, surrounding the city from all sides.

"Then they seized the spiritual from Novgorod and neighboring monasteries and churches, chained them in iron and put them on the right in Gorodishche; every day they beat them on the right, demanding 20 Novgorod rubles from each. The most noble residents and merchants, as well as clerks, were also called. They were shackled, and their houses and property were sealed. On Friday, January 6, 1570, the sovereign arrived with the rest of the army. The next day, an order was given to kill with clubs to death all the abbots and monks who stood on the right ... Then Ivan ordered to bring to himself those Novgorodians who were taken into custody before his arrival. They were sovereign boyars, Novgorod boyar children, elected city and clerk people and noble merchants. Together with them they brought their wives and children. Ivan ordered to undress them and torment them with "inscrutable" , as a contemporary says, with torment, set fire to them with some composition invented by him personally, which he called "burning" (John - one of the outstanding scientists and writers of his time - invented a composition called "some kind of composite fiery wisdom").

Then the tsar ordered the exhausted and singed to be tied to the back of a sleigh, heavily dragged to Novgorod, dragged along the frozen ground and thrown from the bridge to the Volkhov. They were followed by their wives and children. Women were tied back with their hands to their feet, they tied babies to them and, in this form, they threw them into the Volkhov. The royal servants rode along the river with hooks and axes, finishing off those who surfaced.

"The indomitable fury of the tsar continued for five weeks," says an eyewitness of the events. "Trips began to monasteries and surrounding villages, where, before the eyes of the tsar, bread in stacks and in grain was destroyed by fire, horses, cows and all kinds of cattle were chopped with axes and axes. In the Anthony Monastery, the tsar After listening to mass, he ordered the rector and all the monks to be killed, and the monastery to be burned down. Returning to Novgorod, John gave the order to destroy merchant goods, sweep out shops, break courtyards and mansions, destroy houses, destroy household supplies and all the property of the inhabitants. At the same time the royal people traveled in detachments through the fortresses of Novgorod, through villages, villages and boyar estates, ruining dwellings, destroying stocks, killing livestock and poultry ... "

What is most interesting is that all this was done on our own territory!

The murdered Novgorodians - and according to some estimates their number reached 60 thousand people - Volkhov was dammed. The destruction of grain reserves and livestock led to terrible famine and disease not only in the city, but throughout the region. People ate each other and pulled the dead from their graves. Throughout the summer of 1570, the corpses of the dead were brought for burial in mass graves.

"Forever I put the Russian state!" Ivan Vasilyevich used to say, and he was absolutely right.

Was it not according to his methodology that Lenin and Stalin acted word for word after 350 years? But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Having gone through the provinces with fire and sword, Ivan IV returned to Moscow. Order in the capital, order in the state, and the roots of all betrayals lie, of course, in the center. In addition, the time has come to change the top of the "state security", accusing her, as expected, of treason and hiding confiscated treasures and money.

In Moscow, Prince Vyazemsky is arrested, all his relatives are killed, and he himself is tortured with a demand to hand over the treasures. The unfortunate one is laid with his back on the coals, and the king himself rakes the hot coals with a staff to the bare sides of his comrade-in-arms. Vyazemsky gave away everything he had plundered, testifying against many others. And he died in torture.

Further, the father and son of the Basmanovs are taken into custody (Malyuta Skuratov was lucky to die from a wound!), the Duma clerk Viskovaty, the state treasurer Funnikov and other state officials, up to three hundred in number. Mass executions Ivan Vasilyevich "loved very much." They were held in Moscow every Sunday as a kind of festival, where the executioners had the opportunity to demonstrate their high art.

Among other things, these events pursued the goal of ideological education of the people, and therefore were not only free, but also mandatory for residents to visit, who often simply drove to them.

The tsar himself took part with great pleasure in developing the procedures for these mass events, for he was a man with a heightened sense of everything beautiful. He was also a writer, a poet, he knew the Scriptures by heart and, it can be said with certainty, he was also the first Russian composer. Therefore, he strictly monitored that the executions were varied, exotic and painful, both for the executed himself and for the contemplative-educate.

On July 25, gallows, poles lined with tar brushwood, and chopping blocks were placed on Red Square. There was a palisade of stakes with iron tips (This elegant type of execution was borrowed from the Turks. The richest arsenal of Western Europe will come to Russia later. Russia has always absorbed all the best from the surrounding world). The novelty was a huge frying pan in which boiling oil bubbled, sharp iron claws called cats, pincers, saws, needles, ropes specially designed for grinding the body, cauldrons of boiling water and some other devices of the Tsar's personal invention.

They brought the convicts in horrific traces of torture, barely able to stand on their feet.

The king made a grand gesture, temporarily releasing about half of the three hundred people. Those released were soon arrested and executed the next Sunday. The rest were treated according to the detailed procedure. Several dozen were put on a stake, where they died in terrible agony for twelve to fifteen hours. In front of their eyes, in front of all honest people, their wives and daughters were raped and then killed. About fifty people were thrown onto hot pans. Oprichniki with spears did not allow anyone to jump out of the pan, watching a deadly dance in boiling oil. John

laughed to tears.

They hung Viskovaty by his feet and began to saw slowly along the body. Funnikov was alternately doused with cold water and boiling water, then he was skinned, as if from an eel. Each had an individual approach.

Fyodor Basmanov, for example, was given high confidence to personally cut off the head of his father Alexei Basmanov, which the son did with great willingness, after which he was impaled. Ivan Vasilievich shook his head sadly: kill your own father! For this, only on a stake, because giving criminal orders is one thing, but carrying them out is another.

The bodies of the executed lay for several days, tormented by dogs. The wives of the executed, having undergone preliminary rape and abuse, were drowned the next day. However, even here there was an individual approach. For example, Funnikov's wife, a young and beautiful woman who was the sister of the executed Prince Vyazemsky, was put on horseback on a rope stretched between poles and dragged back and forth with her crotch along this rope several times, and then left to die.

So, we saw how Tsar John IV Vasilyevich, having seized the initiative in the war, led it with great success. The war raged, as it should be, vertically and horizontally.

Vertically, she devoured five wives of the king, his two sons and (in fact, all state and public figures from the inner circle of Ivan Vasilyevich, sending him to the grave at the age of 54 years.

Hundreds of thousands of people paid with their lives horizontally. The country was shaken by crop failures, epidemics, poverty and despondency reigned everywhere. People died from hunger and frost. The cities were empty, the fields were overgrown with thistles, the wind was whistling over the empty villages. It would seem that the country is dead. But not at all. She lived, built temples, cast monstrous cannons and huge bells, and, most interestingly, waged incessant external wars. This is interesting, but not at all surprising. An external war was part of the methodology, it was one of the best means of reducing tension in an internal war and exterminating one's hated population at the hands of the enemy. Even then, military experts drew attention to the fact that in wars, Russia did not so much pursue any specific political or territorial goals as exterminates its own people. And the people, poorly organized and not even having potential leaders, since such were exterminated in the first place, scattered wherever their eyes looked. And since even then the western border was very strictly guarded and even blocked by many kilometers of fences, they fled mainly to the south and east. And the Moscow authorities slowly followed them, reaching gradually to the Pacific Ocean, jumped over it to Alaska and the Commanders, expanding the territory, which automatically turned into a theater of military operations. The attitude towards his own army was also textbook: 2300 prisoners of war, released by Batory, were executed to a single person. The captured Livonians and Poles were also exterminated. They were drowned in rivers, poisoned by bears, beaten with sticks and hanged. But the country lived!

Characteristically, during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, not a single organized action against the authorities, which had firmly seized the initiative in the war, was noted in the country. The territory of the state tripled due to the conquest of the Kazan Khanate and Siberia. The great sovereign, as Comrade Stalin liked to call John IV, superbly demonstrated to all his successors the method by which state order can be maintained in a country like Russia.

But not everyone was able to use this method. Knowing a method and being able to do it are two very different things.

The sixth century of the existence of the Russian state was coming to an end. six centuries

continuous wars. What was the person who was called Russian even then turned into?

Power and wealth were in the hands of a small elite. The people lived in terrible poverty. Crafts and trade during this time made several attempts to assert themselves, but were suppressed by the methods we wrote about above. Even the urban population, as if being considered "free", was a pitiful sight. "It could not have been otherwise," the historian notes, "with heavy taxes and burdensome duties forced by long wars, with the ferocity of power and the arbitrariness of the royal servants. who in one way or another was at the execution and used it. It is not surprising that foreigners were surprised at the abundance of royal treasures, and at the same time noticed the extreme poverty of the people. The capital of the kingdom corresponded to this order of things in appearance. on the other hand, the gilded tops of the Kremlin churches and royal towers, on the other hand, heaps of chicken huts of the townspeople and the pitiful dirty appearance of their owners. , not become the subject of a denunciation and not be subjected to royal disgrace, which was followed by the taking away of all his property "on the sovereign" and the poverty of his family. Therefore, he hid the money somewhere in the monastery or buried it in the ground, kept under lock and key in chests embroidered with gold

caftans and coats, sable coats and silver cups, while he himself walked around in a dirty, shabby single-row and ate something from wooden utensils. Uncertainty in security, constant fear of secret enemies, fear of a thunderstorm, ready to strike him from above at any moment, suppressed in him the desire to improve his life, to elegant surroundings, to proper work, to mental work. The Russian man lived anyhow; always in danger of being robbed, deceived, treacherously ruined, he himself ... also deceived, robbed, where he could profit at the expense of his neighbor for the means of his always fragile existence. From this, Russian people differed in home life by untidiness, in work - by laziness, in relations with people - by deceit, deceit and heartlessness.

In the memory of the people, the inhabitants of the occupied country dreamed of an old life, the details of which for six centuries were preserved only in songs and laments, for the public performance of which the death penalty was due.

Legends, laments and epics were transformed into a dream of their own, the people's king. The people did not give up and did not reconcile. He was waiting in the wings to launch a counteroffensive and seize the initiative in the war imposed on him.

His son Theodore, who succeeded John on the throne, was not able to apply the methods perfected by his late parent. Having entered the kingdom, he opened the dungeons, pardoned all the condemned, and even hinted that it was impossible to somehow alleviate the fate of the people brought to an animal state. And, of course, he immediately became known as weak-minded and incapable of control. The turmoil began instantly, because because of the kind weak-willed king, the government almost lost the initiative in the war. A party was instantly created demanding the replacement of Fedor by his half-brother Dmitry, the son of Ivan the Terrible from his seventh wife, Maria Nagoya. The situation was saved by Boris Godunov, who went through an excellent school during the time of Ivan the Terrible and was not accustomed to being belligerent in such situations. Moreover, the wife of Tsar Fedor was his sister Irina, and his own wife was the daughter of Malyuta Skuratov. Even then, the highest representatives of the state elite, including members of the royal family, did not consider it shameful to be related to the top of the state security.

Godunov acted swiftly. The very next day after the death of Ivan the Terrible, all Nagy - relatives of Tsarevich Dmitry by mother - were arrested. Many others were also arrested, who were "commended" by the late tsar.

"Their houses were ruined, their estates and patrimonies were handed out for distribution," that is, they were confiscated. Moscow was worried, instinctively feeling that the new government, for all its ferocity, would still not be able to act by the methods of Ivan the Terrible.

Troops were urgently brought into the capital. Cannons were installed in key squares, their muzzles looked gloomily at the narrow streets of Belokamennaya, ready to break any crowd with grapeshot.

Tsarevich Dmitry and his mother were sent away from sin to Uglich. Dmitry's supporter, the ambitious adventurer Bogdan Belsky, barricaded himself in the Kremlin, sending out leaflets about the usurpation of power. He was immediately accused of murdering Ivan the Terrible, of intending to kill Tsar Fedor, and of wanting to climb the throne of Moscow himself. Artillery of government forces was being pulled up to the Kremlin. An army that spontaneously arose from the fugitive and destitute of the past reign, who wandered through the forests, whom historians, perhaps with good reason, call "the mob", moved to Moscow, organizing itself into paramilitary formations on the go. The Ryazan militia, led by representatives of the degenerate local aristocracy in the person of the Lyapunovs and Kikins, moved towards it to join.

A spontaneous army, allegedly to protect the "legitimate" government, broke into the capital, luring a part of the army units (military people) to its side.

"They came," as the chronicler testifies, "with great strength and weapons, and barely had time to close the Kremlin from them."

Looting and fires began in the city. The government, gaining time by negotiating, pulled up troops to the capital, mercilessly tearing apart the "mob" with buckshot. The Lyapunovs and Kikins were seized and secretly killed in dungeons. The frightened Fyodor, seeing how the helm of state administration was being pulled out of his inept hands, handed all power into the hands of his brother-in-law Boris Godunov, endowing him, in modern terms, with emergency powers.

The ego aroused discontent among the highest aristocracy, which was hushed up during the classical methods of government during the last reign.

The opposition, led by the Romanovs (relatives of the tsar by his first wife Anastasia) and the Shuiskys, excited the people, who were always ready to kindle a fire of civil strife in the country for any reason. Demonstrating the skills acquired in the security service of Ivan the Terrible, Boris Godunov boldly accepted the challenge. With the help of the captured servants of the princes Shuisky, accusations of treason against the emboldened boyars were fabricated. Mass arrests began. The first to be seized was Prince Ivan Petrovich Shuisky, when he was on his way to his Suzdal patrimony. Then the princes of Tatev, Urusov, Kolychev and Bakasov were captured. They took everyone with their families, with servants, disarming their personal paramilitary groups, recruited after the death of Ivan the Terrible.

"They tortured their people with various tortures and shed a lot of blood," the chronicler notes.

At the end of the investigation, a prominent military commander, Ivan Petrovich Shuisky, was exiled to Lake Beloe and strangled there. Prince Andrei Ivanovich Shuisky was exiled to Kargopol and strangled there as well. Other arrested princes were also sent away from Nizhny Novgorod to Astrakhan, and there they were liquidated without much fuss. This was a mistake. The people were accustomed to mass theatrical executions of the times of the last reign, and such secret murders, presented as suicides in addition, testified to the weakness of the new authorities. Moreover, those appointed for liquidation were officially sent to their own estates, there they were arrested again, sent to prisons in remote cities, and only there they were killed. Such indecisiveness of the government, which dared to publicly cut off the heads

only various petty things involved in the intrigue, like Fyodor Nagai "with comrades", did not go unnoticed.

The people revived, feeling not so much their own strength, but the weakening of the enemy. Anonymous letters began to circulate around Moscow, which, in modern terms, exposed the arbitrariness and corruption of the authorities. The people, instigated by the restless aristocratic opposition, again tried to organize themselves into a formidable military force with the aim of destroying any power. The government, as usual, responded with ferocious terror, making it clear that it is not as weak as many would like to think.

"Blood was shed on torture, on the chopping block, blood was shed in the boyar strife," the chronicler coolly notes the usual state of affairs in the country.

In the midst of a new wave of government terror, someone killed Tsarevich Dmitry in Uglich. I must say that if the kind and sickly Tsar Fedor looked very little like his bloodthirsty parent, then Dmitry, although he was still a boy, showed all the signs of a future strong, and therefore ferocious ruler. Apparently, incited by his relatives on the part of his mother, the baby loudly announced daily who and how he intended to liquidate when he ascended the throne. The list was opened by Boris Godunov, whom the tsarevich intended to impale. And, of course, Borne Godunov was accused of the death of the prince.

The official commission of inquiry appointed by the government, as usual, did not come to any specific conclusions, but popular rumor and the aristocratic opposition, having begun a powerful psychological war against the authorities, openly accused these authorities in the person of Boris Godunov of eliminating the future dangerous tsar. And no one doubted that Dmitry would become king. The childless Fyodor Ioanovich, melting before our eyes, was no longer a tenant in the world. He faded away, seeing what his good intentions to rule with the help of goodness and social peace resulted in.

Shortly after the death of the prince, a fire broke out in Moscow, turning most of the capital into ashes. The investigation established that this was the case of three criminals: Prince Shchepin, Lebedev and Baykov, who wanted to rob the royal treasury under cover of a fire. Despite this, the opposition blamed Godunov himself for the arson, who supposedly wanted to divert attention from the murder of the prince in this way. Dozens of those who spread such rumors were seized, creating a continuous investigative-torture conveyor that daily splashed victims onto scaffolds and gallows. The terror assumed such proportions that Metropolitan Dionisy was forced to intervene.

"Seeing much murder and innocent bloodshed," the chronicler wrote, "he, together with Archbishop Varlaam of Krutitsa, began to tell the tsar about Godunov's many lies." Apparently, the sad example of Metropolitan Philip did not wean the church from interfering in the affairs of the authorities, and she, in need of a new example, received it.

Dionysius and Varlaam were "liberated from their dignity," and Archbishop Job of Rostov, completely devoted to Godunov, was elevated to the metropolitanate.

The unrest and tension in the country, as usual, wanted to be weakened by an external war, starting to concentrate troops against Sweden. But at that time, the Crimean Khan Kazy-Girey suddenly appeared near Moscow "with great power."

Russians and Tatars converged near the village of Kolomenskoye. With the help of force and cunning, Khan managed to be thrown back from Moscow and defeated near Tula. But instead of the expected rallying of the people around Godunov, who attributed all the honor of the victory to himself, a rumor was immediately spread in Russia and Ukraine that the khan had so quickly and unexpectedly appeared near Moscow in collusion with Godunov, who thus wanted to divert public opinion from the murder of the prince.

"This rumor circulated among ordinary people," the historian notes. "Aleksinsky, the son of a boyar, denounced his peasant. The peasant was sculpted and tortured in Moscow. He slandered a lot of people. , many people died from torture, others were executed and their tongues were pulled out, others were killed in dungeons and many places were deserted from this ... "

The people in horror continued to scatter to the south and to Siberia. The state followed with heavy steps. "Entire settlements and volosts were empty," the historian writes. "One Englishman, who traveled from Vologda to Yaroslavl, saw on the way up to fifty villages abandoned by the inhabitants ... there was a danger that the middle of the state would lose most of the population."

The government's response was to tighten serfdom. The people, who did not want to work for the government, which they considered occupational from century to century, were forcibly attached to the land and with their hard labor fed the "service class", that is, the army and state security, which destroyed this people. But as soon as supervision weakened, as the people immediately scattered, wandering through the forests, organizing themselves into detachments and gangs, launching their own terror on the high roads and already making raids even on county towns.

The war flared up. Punitive expeditions scoured the country, catching the fugitives, partly destroying them, and partly returning them to the landowners.

Caressing the service class, the historian notes, Boris in 1597 confirmed the law on attaching peasants to the land, established that everyone who had fled from estates and estates over the previous five years should be searched for and returned to obedience to landowners and estate owners; moreover , he legitimized that all those who have served or will serve the masters for at least half a head, become their eternal slaves through that very thing.

The ideological novelty of Godunov was the introduction of the patriarchate, which gave the Russian Orthodox Church the status of complete independence. Metropolitan Job, of course, was elevated to the patriarchate - a faithful man of the ruler. In the midst of these events, Tsar Fedor died.

Using his kinship with the widowed Tsarina Irina, relying on the "apparatus" of state security of the times of Ivan the Terrible, to which he himself belonged, Godunov seized the Moscow thrones, declaring himself tsar. This, of course, was facilitated by the fact that the Russian throne was vacant. In the raging war, all the sons of Ivan the Terrible died (one, as you remember, was killed by John himself with a staff on the head, the second - openly stabbed to death in Uglich, the third - officially died a natural death, although there is a version that Fyodor was poisoned by Godunov). The family of Rurikovich, who for 600 years tried to conquer this unknown country, was interrupted, actually died in an unrelenting war, losing the Moscow throne to anyone who dares to climb on it, leaving him a legacy that flares up like a forest fire, the war.

Godunov took a risk. But it quickly became clear to everyone that this was not a tsar, but an "apparatchik" from the time of Ivan the Terrible with all the shortcomings of an upstart brought up by a tyrant.

"Godunov," notes the perceptive historian, "who, being a boyar, seemed worthy of reigning, appeared on the throne as a boyar and boyar of the times of Grozny, unsure of himself, suspicious, timid, incapable of direct action, open, accustomed to a petty game of sedition and denunciations, unable to control himself, unresourceful in important, decisive cases.

The good intentions announced by Godunov during his ascension to the throne were hardly heard by the people, but they clearly showed that the new tsar was weak and, therefore, doomed. Boris perfectly felt this tension in relations with his subjects, realizing that

that the people are only waiting for an opportunity to deal with him, because they are unable to follow exactly the methodology left to Ivan the Terrible.

Boris was not sick with terrible distrust, suspecting everyone, fearfully listened to every word, every movement, but society did not remain in his debt: his every step was suspected, they did not believe him in anything. He, according to contemporaries, killed Tsarevich Dmitry, poisoned the tsar's daughter, the tsar himself, his sister tsarina Irina, his daughter's fiancé, burned Moscow, brought a khan on her! The tsar and the people played a terrible game with each other, which lasted for centuries between outbreaks of mass terror and mutual slaughter.

"Strife and disagreement reigned in all classes," the historian notes. "No one trusted his neighbor."

The indescribable poverty of the people contrasted sharply with the luxury of the elite. "The prices of commodities have risen incredibly ... great drunkenness, fornication and extravagance reigned in the cities, untruths and all sorts of evil deeds were committed." Denunciation flourished and cultivated. Servants were expressly ordered to denounce their masters. One of the scammers (a servant of Prince Shestunov) was publicly glorified in the square in front of a petition order, announcing that the tsar would favor him with an estate and raise him to boyar children.

"This encouragement," the chronicler states, "had a terrible effect: the boyar people began to plot every one over their boyar. Having agreed among themselves about five and six people, one went to bring, and put the others as witnesses. The same boyar people who did not want to destroy their souls and they did not want to see their masters in blood, destruction and ruin, they were tortured with torture and burned with fire, their tongues were cut and they were imprisoned. And Tsar Boris favored many scammers with estates and money. : priests, blacks, sextons, prosvirni denounced each other, wives denounced their husbands, children denounced their fathers, husbands hid from their wives from such horror, and in these accursed denunciations a lot of innocent blood was shed, many died from torture, others were executed, others sent to prisons and ruined with all the houses ... "People of famous origin, the descendants of Rurik, denounced each other, men denounced the king, women - the queen (daughters of Malyuta Skuratov). Even the future hero of the Time of Troubles, Prince Dmitry Pozharsky, together with his mother, wrote denunciations against Prince Boris Lykov in the hope of taking possession of his property.

I would like to emphasize that the reign of Boris Godunov went down in history as the most moderate, not to say liberal.

The cult of denunciation in a country where everyone hated each other, intriguing and maneuvering in the hope of the possibility of delivering a mortal blow anywhere: indifferently up or down, continued to keep the country in political and moral paralysis. No one had any more or less solid social basis. The tsar hated his boyars, making timid attempts to appeal directly to the people through their heads. The people, hating the boyars and the tsar as their highest representative, were only waiting for an opportunity to destroy all the institutions of state power and the state itself, returning to complete freedom and chaos.

The boyars, equally fiercely hating the tsar and the people, fell silent during the great terror of Ivan the Terrible, began to get into the taste of constant conspiracies with the aim of overthrowing the tsar and even more pressing the people with the heavy hand of unlimited power and arbitrariness. Boris Godunov began to understand that the power, on the throne of which he had so frivolously climbed, could be controlled only with the help of merciless terror. Through a system of political investigation headed by his relative Semyon Godunov, the tsar ordered mass arrests of prominent boyar families.

The first to be captured were the Romanovs, representing a great potential danger, then the Cherkasskys, Sitskys, Reprins, Sheremetevs and many others. The boyars themselves and their servants were subjected to the most severe tortures on charges of sorcery and sorcery. They either found or planted herbs with which they allegedly wanted to "spoil" the king. One of the worst accusations of the time. Of all the Romanov brothers, only Filaret and Ivan survived. The rest were eliminated in various ways. But Godunov could not reach Grozny. The late tsar would have exterminated them all, together with their wives and children, while Godunov limited himself to sending the majority to distant monasteries with forced tonsure, for at heart he was a Western-style liberal. That is, weak. This was perfectly seen both at home and abroad, from where they closely watched the development of events in post-Ivanovo Russia. The Moscow kingdom continued to be shaken by cataclysms.

In 1601, a catastrophic crop failure broke out, resulting in a terrible famine. "People were dying, as they never died from pestilence," the historian writes. "We saw people who, wallowing in the streets, plucked grass like cattle. The dead found human feces in their mouths along with manure. - parents, hosts of guests, human meat were sold in the markets for beef.

Bread prices soared many times over, and when, in a desperate situation, the government ordered the opening of the royal storehouses of bread in order to save the people from mass extermination, the state stocks of grain were plundered by corrupt officials and resold on the black market. But the news of the distribution of the "king's bread" spread throughout the country, and hundreds of thousands of starving people rushed to the capital, hoping to escape inevitable death there. Those who reached the capital received nothing and died right on the streets. There was no one to bury them.

An epidemic broke out: cholera and pestilence. Crime in the country and the capital has reached an unprecedented scale and bitterness. To save themselves from starvation, people gathered in gangs and detachments, earning their bread by force of arms. Many servants and serfs were expelled by their owners because they did not want to feed them. These people "went to the borders in Northern Ukraine, which was already filled with people who were just waiting for an opportunity to start a war with society and the state."

The famine accelerated the organization of the opposition army, which wanted to destroy the state. One of these armies operated on the roads near Moscow itself, effectively blockading the capital, robbing and killing on all roads. This bandit army was led by a certain Khlopko Kosolap. Against Kosolap, a government army led by governor Ivan Basmanov was thrown.

The government army and the army of robbers met in a brutal slaughter near Moscow itself. "The robbers fought," the chronicler notes, "not sparing their heads." Governor Basmanov was killed, but the robbers were defeated. The wounded Kosolap was taken prisoner and quartered in Moscow. Dozens of captured robbers were hanged along the road.

And as if all this was not enough, natural disasters also began. Terrible storms uprooted trees, overturned bell towers. Women and domestic animals gave birth to freaks. Wolves and foxes ran around Moscow.

The government did its best to hide such a state of affairs in the state from foreigners. When foreign ambassadors arrived in Moscow, the death penalty was promised to anyone who dared to tell foreigners anything about the disasters of the Muscovite state. And then for another 400 years as the ruler of this unfortunate country, I will sincerely believe that it is possible to conceal from the world the terrible plagues, the disasters of my state, threatening the people with innumerable punishments for divulging state secrets. Government

lived, fenced off from the people by an impenetrable wall of hatred, which was very well symbolized by the Kremlin wall. The people paid the government the same. Communication between citizens and authorities was carried out by executioners.

Therefore, when at the beginning of 1604 the first rumors came to Moscow about the appearance in Poland of the alive and unharmed Tsarevich Dmitry, whom everyone considered dead in Uglich 8 years ago, the tsar and the government were horrified, forcing them to commit one stupidity after another. The western border was immediately closed. Boris, of course, did not come up with anything new to neutralize this threat, except to unleash a new wave of terror on the head of his own people.

"He," the chronicler notes, "within the state multiplied spies who listened everywhere: did anyone talk about Dmitry, did anyone scold Boris. where they rotted in underground prisons. Boris became inaccessible. Petitioners were driven away with kicks and pushes from the royal porch, and the authorities, knowing that complaints against them would not reach the tsar, committed various violence with impunity ... "

Godunov's "counter-propaganda" service also worked rather rudely, identifying the "resurrected" Dmitri with the defrocked monk Grigory Otrepiev. Otrepiev, who had once worked as a secretary in the patriarchal department, was known to half of Moscow and could not pass himself off as the son of Ivan the Terrible. Nevertheless, this dying "duck" year of the new regime was destined to survive the centuries and take root firmly in Soviet historiography.

As expected, when an unknown person who called himself Dmitry, with a handful of his supporters, adventurers and adventurers, invaded the Moscow kingdom, the tsarist troops began to go over to his side without a fight, opening the way for Dmitry to Moscow.

The mother of Tsarevich Dmitry, Maria Nagaya, in the vows of Martha, was urgently taken to Moscow. She was personally interrogated by Borne himself in the presence of his wife. The nun was demanded that she tell what had happened to her son. She refused to answer. Then the daughter of Malyuta Skuratov began to burn the old woman with a candle. "I was told," said Martha then, "that my son was secretly taken away without my knowledge, and those who said so had already died." Boris ordered that Martha be thrown into prison and kept "with great severity", that is, fed once a week. The former queen, after all.

Meanwhile, the troops went over to Dmitry's side in droves. The people's army and the Cossacks of Ukraine went to join him. The people left the king to the mercy of fate.

On April 13, 1605, Boris Godunov died suddenly. Chaos and turmoil reigned in Moscow. They were afraid to announce the death of the king. The named Dmitry, already at the head of a huge army, was approaching Moscow every hour. Sensing their power, the crowd rushed to the Kremlin. The guard archers did not even try to detain her. Fyodor, the son and heir of Godunov, tried to reason with the crowd by sitting on the throne in the Palace of the Facets, placing his mother and sister next to him. The bursting crowd dragged him from the throne and began to kill him. Maria Godunova lay on her knees, begging not to kill her children. The Godunovs were taken in shameful carts and water nags to their former home and placed on guard. All Godunov's relatives and supporters were seized, beaten and shoved into prisons and dungeons, their houses were robbed and devastated, German doctors were robbed and beaten. "And," concludes the chronicler, "they drank to the point of insensibility, so that many immediately lost their lives."

A few days later, specially selected assassins, led by Mikhail Molchanov, came to the Godunovs' house, strangled Maria Godunova, brutally killed Fyodor, twisting his genitals, outraged Princess Xenia, then arrested Patriarch Job, who continued, in the words of historians, "to serve as a priest" as nothing happened.

The patriarch was taken on a simple cart to the Staritsky-Bogoroditsky Monastery. It was announced to the people that the widow and son of Tsar Boris committed suicide by taking poison. The coffin of Boris himself was taken out of the Archangel Cathedral and buried in a wretched monastery. His wife and son were buried next to him without any rites, like suicides.

The way to the throne for the new king was open.

Even Russian and Soviet history, hostile to Dmitry, does not dare to assert that the Godunovs were exterminated on his orders. Most likely it was a creative initiative of the boyars from Boris's entourage, who wanted to curry favor with the new tsar in this way.

Whoever this mysterious man, who called himself Tsarevich Dmitry, was really Dmitry or a dashing adventurer, a protege of the Vatican and Poland, one thing is clear - he did not know Russia, whose throne he managed to seize. And this is the first proof that he was not Grishka Otrepyev, who had lived in Moscow all his life and probably would not have made even half of the mistakes of the new tsar. By the way, Grigory Otrepiev, whose name was full of Boris Godunov's formidable letters, stigmatizing him as an impostor, and the patriarch's messages, betraying him to eternal damnation, did not leave Moscow anywhere. The new Tsar Dmitry met with Otrepiev. Together they stood on Red Square with a huge gathering of people, demonstrating the deceit and stupidity of the previous regime. In addition, Dmitry publicly met with his mother. Both sobbed, hugging each other on the chest. These were not yet Stalinist times, when, on a call from the regional committee or the Ministry of State Security, mothers could be ordered to recognize or not recognize their son in someone. For all the similarity, the then system was still far from the perfection to which it came in the future. But I repeat, whoever this mysterious man was, he arrived in Moscow simply exhausted from the amount of good intentions that he brought with him.

He did not know about the future war, but subconsciously wanted to make peace, demonstrating mercy and simplicity. It wasn't there. Before he could take the throne, the war broke out in full force, as the new king, without knowing it, expressed good intentions, only inspired his opponents, who automatically became all but a handful of his close friends and supporters. Almost instantly, a conspiracy was formed to overthrow and assassinate the new king. Thanks to a well-established system of denunciations, the conspiracy was uncovered and its organizer, Vasily Shuisky, was captured.

And then Tsar Dmitry made his most terrible mistake. Shuisky, who had already laid his head on the chopping block under the executioner's ax, was granted forgiveness. It was mortally dangerous to do so in the Muscovite kingdom. The people immediately realized that the new king was somehow not real if he did not have the courage to execute his enemy-conspirator. And Dmitry continues to do one stupid thing after another: he removes the guard from the Kremlin, he communicates with his subjects, publicly gives lessons in fencing and vaulting, comes up with numerous projects for the transformation and education of the homespun kingdom, which is stuck in an ongoing war and stagnation.

Even for the dashing French King Henry IV, a contemporary of Dmitry, such experiences of familiarity with his subjects ended tragically, and for the Tsar of Moscow they simply could not end in anything else.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, without having reigned even a year, Dmitry was brutally murdered on the day of his wedding, his corpse was burned after a public reproach, and the ashes were fired from a cannon. But if in France the killer of the king was publicly torn apart by horses, then in Moscow the killer of Tsar Dmitry took his throne. It turned out to be Vasily Shuisky, so frivolously pardoned by the late tsar.

After the accession of Shuisky, events began to spiral out of control. A rumor was immediately spread that Dmitry had escaped and was marching on Moscow with an army. In Moscow the next morning, on the houses of foreigners and boyars, they wrote that the tsar was selling the houses of these traitors to the people for plunder.

Massacres began for everyone. Many cities rebelled, having no political programs, but simply not wanting to accept the authority of Moscow. The rumor about the rescue of Dmitry was unconditionally perceived by almost everyone, so some dashing adventurer very quickly appeared, declaring himself saved twice by Dmitry and remaining in history under the name of False Dmitry II. It was also impossible to find out his identity, but even those who refused to support his late predecessor joined him. Moreover, the new Dmitry was publicly recognized by the failed wife of the first Dmitry, Marina Mnishek, who entered into a marriage alliance with the second and even gave birth to a son from him, named Tsarevich Ivan.

The success of the first Dmitry inspired all of Russia. The number of self-proclaimed pretenders to the throne multiplied with terrifying speed. They posed as non-existent children of Tsar Fedor or Ivan the Terrible by any of his seven wives. Everyone gathered an army and went to Moscow, crushing and destroying everything in its path. Some pretenders openly plundered the province, exterminating the population and leaving with booty to the south.

In addition to them, spontaneous and huge popular armies gathered, boldly entering into battle with the troops of the king, and with detachments of impostors. The huge army of Ivan Bolotnikov, having united with the Cossacks of the false prince Peter, defeated the troops of Vasily Shuisky, approached Moscow.

False Dmitry II settled in Tushino, sending letters and appeals around Russia. The Polish army, brought into Russia after the assassination of the first Dmitry, decomposed to the level of a robber gang. Joint Russian-Polish armed gangs roamed the country, looting and killing. In the other direction, detachments of Zaporozhian and Don Cossacks roamed, exterminating people, destroying livestock, and raping women. Cities burned, villages emptied, people scattered in horror in all directions. The armed forces involved in this all-destroying apocalypse quickly became marauders, no matter under whose banner they acted. Everyone exterminated each other with some kind of enthusiasm and joy. One of the Cossack gangs seized the Novodevichy Convent, raping the nuns, among whom were several former queens and princesses.

Vasily Shuisky was almost instantly overthrown from the throne, forcibly tonsured and handed over to the Poles, in whose captivity he died. False Dmitry II was also killed by his accomplices. Ivan Bolotnikov was captured and drowned in a hole. Poisoned Skopin-Shuisky, who tried to restore order with the help of Swedish troops. The false prince Peter is torn to pieces. Marina Mnishek with her baby son fled from Tushin, falling into the hands of Ataman Zarutsky, who, for some unknown reason, dreamed of such prey. All three were captured. Zarutsky is impaled, Marina is sewn up in a sack and drowned in an ice-hole, and her unfortunate child is publicly hanged at the Serpukhov Gate in Moscow.

Cities and villages burned, Moscow burned to the ground, this time along with the Kremlin and the royal chambers. The royal treasures, including coronation relics, were stolen. Even the floors in the wards were taken apart. The royal chambers were burned. Cathedrals were looted and desecrated. In Russia, temples and monasteries were destroyed and plundered no less than in Bolshevik times ..

For several years no one sowed or plowed. Cannibalism flourished openly. In warehouses and barns stood barrels of human corned beef. Ravens circled over the burnt cities and villages. Wolves howled in the squares of ruined cities.

All border areas were captured by neighbors, whose armies were afraid to go further, so as not to get stuck in bloody chaos.

Epidemics raged, completing the devastation of the country.

The completely senseless and aimless seven-year ruthless exterminatory war of all with all claimed the lives of three kings, almost completely exterminated the nobility that had been formed over the last century and a half and at least one and a half million people, while the then number of the kingdom was just over three million people. All government bodies, the armed forces and the country's economy were destroyed.

It was a war that cannot be called a revolution, or even some kind of rebellion, because it turned out to be completely fruitless in its consequences, unlike all contemporary European revolutions and civil strife (plus or minus 50 years), far surpassing them in duration and ruthlessness. Having actually destroyed the country, filling it with blood and covering it with ruins, this war, according to the historian's apt remark, "did not introduce a single new beginning into the life of the people, did not indicate a new path to its future." And she couldn't do it. Both sides simply came to complete exhaustion and, taking a breath, were waiting for a new moment. Both sides were enriched with excellent experience for the future, passing, according to the historian, an excellent practical school of "treason, strife, political madness, deceit, duplicity, militant frivolity, licentiousness and personal selfishness."

This war took away the last crumbs of a sense of citizenship and mutual responsibility of the authorities and the people. It was time for chaos.

The authorities were the first to come to their senses and, having quickly chosen a new lad-king for themselves, they hastily began to sculpt a model of a police-slave-owning state, for many centuries ahead of all the totalitarian regimes in the world in this respect.

But for the people this time was not in vain. He learned how to quickly organize into powerful armed groups, keeping the authorities in a state of constant military tension and forcing them to act according to the methods of Ivan the Terrible from year to year and from century to century ... "

I closed the book, realizing that I needed to rest. From everything I read, my head ached, I looked for an analgin tablet, did not find it and decided that it was enough for today. But I read only 50 pages out of six hundred.

If I read at such a pace, then the three days allocated by Colonel Klimov will clearly not be enough for me. Before going to bed, I went to the window again. The street was quiet and calm. Some of the windows of the houses were still glowing. No wild, all smashing crowds, no fires, no gallows.

"The country is dead," I recalled the conclusion of the author. And with that thought, he went to bed.

Chapter 6

In the morning, after drinking coffee with pies in the buffet, I returned to my room. I took the "diplomat" with the book with me, since I did not rule out the possibility that someone would break into my room and steal the top-secret "document". Somewhere in my head, the thought was constantly itching that they could come to me with a search right in the room. Continue to read this, pardon the expression,

nonsense or, to put it mildly, an unsystematic set of biased historical facts, I didn't want to at all. I don't like history at all. I confess that even the history of the CPSU and all sorts of scientific communism and even the history of law read to us for, it seems, one semester, I could not stand, I skipped lectures and handed over these sciences with sin in half. But he loved historical films. "Alexander Nevsky" watched three times, where Cherkasov plays. "Pyotr" with Simonov, I also really liked. Or "Unforgettable 1919". And most importantly, what I liked was that our kind and naive people always sought to rally around a prince, king or leader, revering him as the father of a large family.

I happened to conduct criminal cases of citizens who fell into Russian bourgeois nationalism, and from their underground publications I remembered that it was this quality of our people that received the name: collegiality, which has now resulted in the unity of the party and the people.

I did not want to read, but Klimov ordered to read the book, and there was nothing to do. In the end, in the course of investigative cases, I had to delve into more boring and ridiculous materials.

I opened the "ledger" again, but I could no longer read as carefully as I did yesterday, quickly moving my eyes over the pages, fixing the most entertaining moments in my memory. If we are talking about identifying and imprisoning the author, then what I have already read is enough for me.

The second chapter of the book was called "Death of Muscovite Rus".

Desperate attempts by the regimes of Mikhail Fedorovich and Alexei Mikhailovich to somehow stabilize the situation in the country. New fierce laws forbidding the people to mention the royal name even in conversations on any occasion and its even greater enslavement. Robbery gangs that continue to scour the whole country, robbing and killing everyone around. Palace intrigues and mysterious deaths. military defeats. New impostors with claims to the throne. Decapitation, quartering, wheeling, burning, burying alive, impaling, hanging by the ribs, filling the throat with metal, whipping to death, cutting off hands, feet and fingers, cutting off ears, tearing out nostrils, cutting off tongues, branding are the only ways communication between people and authorities. Bribery, theft, treason, intrigue.

The mysterious impostor Akundinov, flying around Europe with claims to the Russian throne, posing as Tsarevich Ivan Dmitrievich - the rescued son of Marina Mnishek, who was hanged at the age of three. He was arrested in Holland and extradited to Moscow for the right to trade with Persia through Russia. Severe torture, confrontation with the mother - public quartering.

The first systematized code of laws is the Code of 1649, which provides for the death penalty in 200 cases and the whipping in 141 cases.

A terrible people's war led by Stepan Razin. Twitch on the gallows and end up on stakes representatives of the administrations of the captured cities. Pyramids of severed heads who did not want to join the uprising. The government's countermeasures are the burning and extermination of entire counties involved in the rebellion. The uprising of the peasants of the Don region, as well as the Tambov, Simbirsk and Penza provinces. Their almost universal extermination. Punitive expedition of Prince Dolgoruky.

"Around Arzamas, where Dolgoruky set up his camp," writes a foreign observer, "gibbets hung with corpses were seen everywhere."

which others lived for the third day. In general, within three months, at least 11,000 people were executed or brutally tortured."

And at the end of it all - the split of the state church, when Patriarch Nikon tried to introduce a new translation of the Bible to replace the previous one, done extremely carelessly. Almost half of Russia did not accept the new church books and rituals. The government, as usual, responded with mass terror. Bonfires blazed, burning hundreds of schismatics. One of the leaders of the schism, Archpriest Avvakum, a passionate and uncompromising publicist of his time, wrote: "And along the Volga, thousands of thousands of those living in cities and villages and villages were put under the sword who did not want to accept the seals of Antichrist." The schismatics fled in droves from cities and villages from this terrible terror, went to the forest jungle, to uninhabited places on the outskirts, to the deaf northern forests of Pomorie, where they found the descendants of those who had gone there back in the 9th century from the Varangians.

In the raging religious strife, which was destined to continue for several centuries, in parallel or intersecting with the ongoing secular war, the recent lights of the church perished. Patriarch Nikoi was deprived of his patriarchate and sent to monastic imprisonment, Archpriest Avvakum was burned in a log house, numerous clergy went into the forests, creating partisan detachments of the "true faith".

In such circumstances, surrounded by a host of enemies, losing the initiative, the authorities feverishly tried to create an effective punitive apparatus. Investigative and robbery orders were established, and, finally, the order of secret affairs - the first real institution of political investigation in Russia, responsible directly to the tsar and in charge of the legally formalized Code of 1649, the so-called. "Great Sovereign Deeds", better known as "The Word and Deed of the Sovereign". Any verbal insult to majesty or a disapproving word about the actions of the sovereign was brought under the concept of a state crime punishable by death. Under pain of the death penalty, a duty was established to report on crimes of this kind - "to speak the word and deed of the sovereign." The one who said "word and deed" was immediately taken to the dungeon for interrogation, and then they seized and tortured the one whom he pointed to. When these terrible words were heard in the streets, squares or other public places, everyone immediately scattered.

The archives of the Order of Secret Affairs are full of documents testifying to the desire of the authorities to turn the people not just into slaves, but into dumb slaves who do not even dare to open their mouths without special permission. Dragoon Yevposhka once, drinking a glass of vodka, said: "If only the Tsar, Grand Duke Alexei Mikhailovich would be healthy, but I, Yevtyushka, are different." It is difficult to find any malicious intent in these words of the serviceman. Rather, the toast can be considered quite loyal and even loyal. But "word and deed" were reported against him, and because in one phrase he dared to pronounce the name of the king and his own, that is, as if to equate them, the soldier was severely beaten with batogs. And there are more than 90% of such cases. They were not too lazy to take the accused from the farthest corners of the country to the order and severely punish, say, for retelling a dream where one peasant dreamed that he was in the Kremlin and was drinking with the tsar.

Mercilessly punished with a whip, the unfortunate man was sent to prison with the instruction "not to tell anyone yo

But nothing helped. Vodka riots, bread riots, copper riots (when the tsar decided to take all the "convertible" currency for himself, and leave one copper for his subjects), uprisings in the capital, in Novgorod and Pskov. Executions, punitive expeditions, gallows, chopping blocks, bonfires. Exhausted by unrest, torn apart by the intrigues of favorites (relatives of the first and second wives), Alexei Mikhailovich suddenly died before reaching the age of 47, leaving 11 children acquired in two marriages. Having received the nickname "the quietest", Alexei Mikhailovich was not by nature a ferocious or even evil person. On the contrary, almost all contemporaries note that he was cheerful and good-natured. He was forced to wage war, which he did not start and, of course, was unable to end, although he tried to adhere to the methods of the great John.

The Moscow kingdom was torn apart by political, economic, social and ideological crises. After the death of Alexei Mikhailovich, a crisis of power was added to this, since his eldest sons turned out to be completely incapable of governing such a state as Muscovite Rus'. In 1686, something happened that the government had been expecting with fear for a long time: an uprising of the troops of the Moscow garrison began.

The formal reason for the rebellion was the sudden death of Tsar Fedor (in Moscow and Russia there was a persistent rumor that he was poisoned by the Naryshkins, relatives of the new queen) and the enthronement of two young kings (from the first and second wives) Ivan and Peter. The Streltsy army, which constituted the elite of the then armed forces, was the main support of the government, especially in the kingdom of Alexei Mikhailovich, when riots and uprisings hit the Kremlin walls with the continuity of the ocean surf. However, the ongoing national crisis could not but affect the archers, among whom, by the way, there were many secret schismatics. To a large extent, this was facilitated by the attitude of the command towards the rank and file, which was the same as everywhere else in Russia: a complete lack of mutual respect, dull hostility and complete arbitrariness.

The colonels robbed the archers, forcing them to work for themselves, forced them to purchase uniforms at their own expense, which were supposed to come "from the treasury", appropriated their salaries. Even during the battles with the army of Stepan Razin, there was ferment among the archers and a drop in discipline was strongly felt. Even during the life of Tsar Fedor, the archers filed a collective complaint against their commanders, but instead of resolving the issue, the petitioners, as usual, were beaten with a whip. This "wise" action of the government, blind from fear, led to an open rebellion. Several colonels were killed in the traditional way among the archers: they were dragged to the towers and thrown from there to the ground. Afraid of losing their practically only! support in the country, the government compromised, paying off from the archers with money and not only freeing them from responsibility for the murder of colonels, but also covering up the lynching with the arrest of many other commanders.

All this was enough for the archers to feel like praetorians - an inevitable phenomenon in a totalitarian country, where the army is the only guarantor of the legitimacy of the authorities and tranquility in the state. Immediately after the death of Tsar Fedor, a rumor spread around Moscow about the murder of Tsar Ivan by the Naryshkins and about Ivan Naryshkin's desire to proclaim himself tsar. Whether this was the result of a planned conspiracy or a spontaneous outburst of long-accumulated hatred, it is difficult to say, but on the morning of May 15th, the archers in full armor converged on the Kremlin and broke into it without a fight, since the Kremlin guards also consisted of archers who joined the rebellion.

Having killed several people along the way, the archers surrounded the Red Porch in front of the Faceted Chamber and loudly demanded the head of Ivan Naryshkin, allegedly guilty of the murder of Tsar Ivan. In vain, a crowd of armed soldiers who had drunk in the morning were carried out and shown alive Ivan, in vain did Tsarina Natalya and her named father boyar Matveev try to calm the soldiers - the roaring crowd continued to demand the head of Ivan Naryshkin.

Called to the archers, the commander of all their formations, Prince Mikhail Dolgoruky, tried to call his subordinates to obedience, finding nothing better in the situation that had arisen, how to promise to hang them all without exception. He simply did not know any other language with his subordinates. The commander was seized and thrown from the porch onto raised spears, and then cut into pieces with axes.

Boyar Matveyev was next to be seized, tearing him away from the weeping Tsaritsa Natalya, who was holding the infant Ivan in her arms. Matveev was lifted on a spear and cut into pieces.

Murders also took place in the city, developing into robberies. "Every activity

government ceased, - the historian notes. "There was no one who could or wanted to take any action against the rebels. The life of all dignitaries was in terrible danger. Judges, clerks, clerks, clerks hid wherever they could. "The capital was given over to plunder its own army.

Bursting into the royal palace, the archers began a general search of the chambers and other premises. Streltsy officers Goryushkin and Yurenev, who were on guard at the entrance, who tried to block their way, were cut to pieces. The archers turned all the rooms upside down, piercing featherbeds and pillows with spears, in search of Ivan Naryshkin. The young stolnik Fyodor Saltykov, who was mistaken for Naryshkin, was the first to be killed. Duma clerk Larionov was found in a chest. He was lifted up on spears and cut into pieces. In the city, the deacon's house was plundered and his son was killed. Afanasy Naryshkin was discovered under the altar of the Church of the Resurrection in Senyah. He was dragged by his feet onto the porch, thrown on spears and hacked to pieces. Prince Grigory Romodanovsky and his son Andrei were captured between the Chudov Monastery and the Patriarchal court. Both were tortured and hacked to death.

"Is it nice? Is it nice?" the archers shouted, raising the body of another victim on spears. "Love! Love!" the drunken crowd roared.

The mutilated bodies of the dead were dragged to Red Square with shouts and hoots. In the city, archers broke into the house of Prince Yuri Dolgorukov. First, they apologized for the murder of his son Michael, and then they hacked to death the sick old man and threw his body into a dunghill.

Orders were looted, archives burned, especially the Kholopsky order.

The next day the atrocities continued. The archers continued to scour the palace: they killed the duma clerk Kirillov, hacked to death another of their colonel Dokhturov and demanded the extradition of a foreign doctor Daniel, who was allegedly guilty of poisoning Tsar Fedor. The doctor could not be found, but his assistant and 20-year-old son were killed. They wanted to kill the father of Tsaritsa Natalya, who, crying on her knees, begged her father for life on the condition that he immediately take a tonsure in the Knrillo-Belozersky monastery. In the hearts, a young man, a distant relative of the Naryshkins, who turned up under the arm, was killed. They continued to look for Ivan Naryshkin, but without finding him (he was successfully hidden in a closet behind a pile of pillows), "the crowd, shouting and obscene curses, left the Kremlin, placing guards at all gates."

Outrages and murders wave after wave swept through the capital. In one of the houses, a prominent statesman from the time of Tsar Fedor, Yazykov, was found. They dragged him by the feet to the square and cut off his head.

Early in the morning of May 17, in the German Quarter, a beggar was caught in the clothes and in bast shoes of the royal doctor Daniel. "The archers, drunk to disgrace," the historian writes, "in the same shirts with reeds and spears, walked in a huge crowd to the palace, leading their victim in front." In vain the queen and princesses assured the archers that the doctor was not to blame for anything, that they themselves drank the medicine that they gave the king. Daniel was taken to the dungeon, tortured with fire and pincers, and then cut into pieces, hung upside down.

Then they announced to the helpless tsarina and tsarevnas that they would kill them all, along with their children, if they were not told where Ivan Naryshkin was hiding. The women, distraught with horror, knowing full well that this was not just a threat, began to persuade Ivan Naryshkin to sacrifice himself for them and the children. Ivan agreed. He took communion of the Holy Mysteries and, carrying before him the icon of the Mother of God (in the hope that the archers would be afraid of her), surrounded by the queen and princesses, he went out to the archers. Streltsy, knocking the icon out of his hands into the mud, not at all embarrassed by the presence of women, with loud obscene abuse, rushed at Ivan, gra

unfortunate by the hair, dragged down the stairs, dragged through the entire Kremlin to the Konstantinovsky dungeon, broke on the rack, burned with fire, gave 50 blows with a whip, then dragged out to Red Square, lifted on spears, chopped into small pieces and with wild abuse trampled these pieces into dirt.

Having defeated the Kholopy order, the archers declared freedom to the serfs and servants of the boyars, thereby detonating uprisings in the vicinity of Moscow and in the provinces. As a result, tired of blood and outrages, perfectly realizing the weakness of power, the archers allowed themselves to be persuaded to stop the bloody bacchanalia in the capital. They not only did not bear any responsibility for the murders of prominent statesmen and dignitaries of the state, but demanded that the property of the murdered be confiscated and distributed to them. In addition, they demanded a one-time allowance - each 10 rubles in silver and the payment of an owed salary of 240 thousand rubles.

The government, headed by Princess Sophia for lack of adult men, was forced to satisfy all the demands of the rebels, after which they suppressed all the uprisings, which they themselves had initiated, with no less enthusiasm. The government was held hostage by an armed and undisciplined army mob. The state was in a fever and, as usual, it was rapidly falling into a state of complete chaos.

State institutions practically did not function, military riots and upheavals occurred daily, trade froze, frightened boyars did not meddle in state affairs, and those who dared to do so usually did not live long. A couple of days of triumph and enthusiastic cries of "Lubo!" with throwing hats up, and then either the chopping block or death on the spears of their own admirers. Numerous armed detachments continued to torment the country, robbing and killing everyone in a row under incomprehensible political slogans. The dissenters became more aggressive. The impostors reappeared. Aggressive neighbors have become more active at the borders. The Muscovite kingdom, picking up speed, was sliding towards the abyss.

At that moment, there was a sharp intervention from the West, which finished off Muscovite Rus', creating in its place a completely new and incomprehensible European-Asian formation, for many years turning it into its raw material appendage and cannon fodder storage. It is possible that this would have happened earlier if not for the 30-year war, but earlier for the revolution in England.

Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, Western merchants, especially the Dutch and Germans, carried on intensive trade, using the territory of the Muscovite kingdom as a transit to Persia and India. There was no shorter and cheaper way to these exotic countries. They also exported traditional Russian export goods for centuries: bread, timber, hemp, resin and furs. Goods were obscenely cheap, thanks in large part to cheap, in fact, free labor.

Everything would be fine, but the constant war in the state, eternal upheavals, unrest and riots turned trade operations almost into military ones. Trade caravans looked like military convoys. How many dangers lay in wait for merchants only on the Volga! It is hard to imagine how merchant caravans passed along this route in those years. But they passed, surrounded by guards armed to the teeth, bristling with cannons and muskets. Many caravans disappeared without a trace, and unknown corpses in Western European camisoles were washed ashore along the entire course of the great river.

All this, of course, increased overhead costs and made the product more expensive, lowering its competitiveness in the European market and reducing profits, which theoretically could be fabulous. A quarter of bread in Russia cost 2 rubles and kopecks, and on the Amsterdam Grain Exchange the same quarter went for 125 guilders. And 1 gulden cost 10

rubles! Naturally, all foreign merchants dreamed that civil harmony would finally be established in this unfortunate kingdom. Without really knowing Russian history, the Europeans never ceased to wonder: why do people of the same blood and the same faith hate each other so fiercely?

But they've been dealing with Russia long enough to figure out how to bring order here. In principle, this was also not wanted, because terror, which always gets out of control of the authorities and takes the form of a natural disaster, also did not contribute to commercial prosperity. Suffice it to recall how many people and goods died during the time of Ivan the Terrible and in the Time of Troubles!

And then an idea arose, which by the 70s of the 17th century took shape in a fairly well-developed plan: to spread the values of a creative Western civilization to Russia, to achieve political stability in this country, tightly tying it economically and spiritually to Europe, finally tearing it away from the barbarian Asian despotism. Since the time of Boris Godunov, first timid, and then more persistent attempts to implement this plan have been made. However, things did not go beyond the passion of the court and the nobility for Western outfits, perfumes and jewelry. Even the aging Alexei Mikhailovich himself somehow shaved off his beard and dressed up in a half-French-half-Polish suit to please the young Natasha Naryshkina, but that was just an episode. The government, preoccupied with the internal war, brushed aside Europe and even, according to some historians, financed all sides in the Thirty Years' War to the best of its ability, with the main goal of Europe interfering less in Moscow affairs.

The second, more private problem that worried foreigners was the transportation of goods that had to be transported through Arkhangelsk and around Scandinavia to their native Dutch and Hanseatic ports. Arkhangelsk was ice-bound for most of the year, and even in summer the journey through the North Cape and the White Sea on wooden sailboats was extremely difficult and dangerous, almost tripling the overhead costs and the cost of goods and, accordingly, reducing profits. However, one glance at the map was enough to see a direct, short and completely safe (in comparison with the northern) sea route through the Baltic to Hamburg and Amsterdam.

The only trouble was that Russia had no access to the sea, but even if it had, it did little, since the country did not have a navy, and the entire Baltic Sea, including the Gulf of Finland, was controlled by the powerful fleet of the Swedish king. To pay him duties for the transport of goods meant to nullify the entire economic effect of the planned operation, the essence of which was unpretentiously simple: to incite Russia to create a navy with the help of Dutch and German specialists and instructors, and with the help of this fleet to seize dominance on the trade routes coming from Europe to Russia.

With this bold project, foreigners tried to inspire even Ivan the Terrible and Boris Godunov, and then the first two tsars from the Romanov dynasty. They scaredly crossed themselves and waved them away. Only this was not enough for them: to recruit people for the construction of naval bases and ships, to recruit naval teams from homespun men who saw water only in wells. These are new troubles and upheavals. And for what? For the profit of the Germans? Yes, and a vague prophecy was circulating in Rus' that one of the holy elders - the sad ones of the Russian land - said: "To be cursed to the Russian fleet." The Novorossiysk tragedy, the nightmare of the Tallinn crossing or the Kronstadt rebellion - but he spoke clearly. Therefore, the Dutch, who then had the second most powerful navy in the world, were hinted that they should ensure this entire operation with their fleet, breaking through from west to east, and not from east to west. And that's exactly what they didn't want to do.

Firstly, a long-term struggle with England for supremacy at sea was in full swing, and it was very difficult to divert large forces to the east, and, secondly, it was completely stupid to automatically create an Anglo-Swedish naval alliance against their own country.

Continuing to insist on their own, foreigners managed to incite the Russian government to build the first Russian warship, called the Eagle. But before anyone could be convinced of its usefulness, the ship was captured and burned by Stepan Razin. The case hung in the air, leading foreigners to despair.

And then, just like a gift from Heaven, the young Tsar Peter Alekseevich, recklessly thrown there by Princess Sophia, apparently in the secret hope of organizing something like the events in Uglich in 1591 there. The Dutch and Germans instantly appreciated this gift from Heaven. Nervous, prone to epilepsy, emotional, enthusiastic and impressionable young man, at the same time cruel, ambitious and vindictive, quickly fell, in modern terms, under Western influence and was, again using communist vocabulary, recruited by Western intelligence services, which in those years, when Europe did not yet have the present revelry of democracy, were, perhaps, stronger than the existing ones.

Under the guidance of foreign instructors and on a foreign model, armed forces defying the government were created inside the state, disguised as amusing regiments for the entertainment of the young monarch. Princess Sophia, naturally, who did not read Orwell, did not realize that the blind and helpless puppies that had disappeared somewhere could return in the form of huge and formidable shepherd dogs that could tear everything around.

And so it happened. The merchant's dream began to be realized with unprecedented swiftness. No one, as they say, did not even have time to gasp and cross himself, as Muscovite Rus' was destroyed. Her ever-rebellious archery army was physically exterminated to the last man. The massacres of archers, accompanied by barbaric torture of themselves and their families, became a terrible memory even in the continuously bloody path of Russian history. Peter himself personally executed 80 people and tortured about the same number.

All state institutions of Muscovite Rus were destroyed, and the capital of the abolished state was transferred to the wilds and Finnish swamps - to the point indicated by foreigners as a window to Europe. That is, the place from where it is most convenient to export goods to Europe.

An unprecedented military shipbuilding program for a continental country was launched, and a war with Sweden began, which continued continuously for 22 years. All of Russia was ordered to change into Western European dress and shave off their beards. The patriarchy was abolished, and education and national culture were reorganized in the Western manner.

All this, of course, was accompanied by a campaign of mass terror, unprecedented even in the history of Russia, against all segments of the population, terror, before which the battles of the times of Ivan the Terrible and the Time of Troubles faded. Years will pass, and the Petrovsky terror will seem like a blue fairy tale when the communist terror begins. The rise of terror is so far the only component of our history...

People from all provinces were driven from all provinces to build shipyards, ships and naval bases, to create a new capital. Bodies of political investigation: the Preobrazhensky Prikaz and the Secret Chancellery, which was created later, can rightfully be considered the forerunners of the Leninist Cheka. For one careless word, for any remark on a drunken case, schoolchildren and deep old women, workers and yesterday's comrades-in-arms were broken on the rack, they tore their nostrils, beat

whips and gauntlets (foreign novelty), pulled out tongues, cut off heads, impaled, burned over low heat, wheeled and quartered. "Word and deed" reigned over the country.

"Whoever sins against His Majesty with blasphemous words, his action and intention to despise and indecently talk about it, he has to be deprived of his stomach, and be executed by cutting off his head." Peter personally supervises the work of the punitive organs. "Torture until he confesses", "you can torture to death", "execute by death on the wheel", - the countless personal instructions of the tsar to the leadership of the "state security" are full of. Or even worse: "Do not execute by death. Hand over to doctors for experiments. Here they are - the origins of medical experiments on living people, which so horrified the world community at the Nuremberg trials. But foreign doctors, who were supplied with human material for experiments, did not protest, but thanked the Russian Tsar.

Developing a creatively totalitarian system, Peter issues a nominal decree: "on reporting on those who write behind closed doors, and on punishing those who knew who wrote behind closed doors, and they did not report about it." To write anything without the permission of the authorities, regardless of the content written, was mortally dangerous: this action was considered as the most serious state crime. Peter had every reason to do so. Whatever the embryonic state of public opinion in Russia, the Peter's terror stirred it up. A few educated people, mainly among the clergy, tried to understand the nature of this new horror that fell upon the country.

In one of the monasteries, "locked" in a cell, a certain monk wrote a treatise on the appearance of the Antichrist in Rus'. It was based on ancient prophecies and legends predicting this event. The abbot of the monastery, having learned about the treatise, asked for the manuscript, read it and said to the monk: "You are mistaken, brother. This is not the Antichrist yet. This is the forerunner. The Antichrist is coming in 200 years." It was said in 1717. Both were captured, "naked from dignity", subjected to the most severe torture (to determine the accomplices and the number of copies of the manuscript), wheeled (arms and legs were crushed) and hung to die by the rib on a hook.

Even at the very beginning of the "glorious deeds", the writer Grigory Talitsky was captured with a group that also spoke about the coming of the Antichrist and printed something like information releases on a self-made printing press. Everyone, including the master who made the machine, and the merchant who gave money (3 rubles) for paper, were subjected to terrible torture with needles and, given the "special danger of their crime", were sentenced to a complex and rarely used execution by "smoking alive" followed by quartering.

Peter personally tortures his own son and heir, Tsarevich Alexei, on the rack, forcing his wife Ekaterina, a Finnish prostitute, elevated by him to the rank of empress, to do the same. She does this with particular pleasure - the prince blocks the way to the throne for her children. Peter snatches the whip from her and continues to torture his son, and then personally beheads him (so as not to disgrace him with the touch of "Kat's hands"). The whole fault of the son was that he was not enthusiastic about the insane improvisations of his obviously mentally deranged parent, which in the future would be called "the great Peter's reforms." Seized with fits of suspicion, Peter brutally executes many of his comrades-in-arms, and in the intervals between executions he relaxes in drunken and rude orgies of the "All-Jesters' Cathedral" - some kind of mixture of criminal raspberries and a bunch of militant atheists of later times.

And in the Secret Chancellery, the court beauty Maria Hamilton is beaten on the rack with a whip. In the presence of the king, a 22-year-old girl, despite her pleas, is publicly beheaded. Peter lifts the dead head from the scaffold, kisses it on the lips and, unexpectedly for everyone, raises it above the crowd and begins to lecture the crowd on anatomy from the scaffold, explaining "which vein in the head is intended for what."

Suffering from many psychoses, the tsar, who appropriated the title of Emperor and "Father of the Fatherland", suffers from childhood and necrophilia - a rare type of mental disorder. So the war goes vertically, devouring members of the royal family and high dignitaries. But what is being done horizontally, where a crushed people has been fighting for its survival for centuries?

The villages of schismatics are burning. The troops methodically comb the forests. The schismatics put up fierce resistance, preferring mass self-immolation to surrender. Taken by surprise, the population of the Siberian city of Torovets, "caught in a schism", by order of Peter, is impaled - every single person, including babies. Torovicians are still called "kolovichi". Gallows sway along the rivers and stakes with severed heads of participants in the Bulavinsky and Astrakhan uprisings stand. In St. Petersburg, people are wheeled daily (the tsar's favorite execution, taken from abroad) and 20 "robbers" are hung by the ribs. In Moscow, hated by the tsar, they are impaled in masses right on Red Square. History conveyed the name of Major Glebov, who dared to "pity" the first wife of Tsar Evdokia, who was exiled to a distant monastery. The major died for 18 hours on a stake that came out of his anus into the back of his head. And how many were nameless? But the fleet and the new capital continued to build, and the war that raged from Narva to Poltava had no end in sight.

"Many thousands of people from all over Russia," writes the fiction historian, "worked on the construction of the city. Floods washed away the work, fire devastated it, hunger and ulcer mowed down the people, and again stretched to the marshy roads, along the forest paths of the party of masons, woodcutters, barrels, leather man. Some were forged into iron so as not to run away, others were marked to death at the milestones, at the Tuin hut. Dragoon escorts, shaved like cats, in overseas green caftans, did not know mercy. The royal city was built on the edge of the earth, in swamps "Who needed it, for what still new flour it was necessary to shed sweat and blood and die in thousands - the people did not know. But the earth groaned from the taxes, dues, road and military duties. Complaining and complaining was forbidden. Those careless who dared to do this, having their hands and feet in iron, they were taken to the Preobrazhensky order or the Secret Chancellery, and there was happiness, to whom they simply chopped off their heads: others were torn with teeth or pierced through with an iron stake or smoked alive. Terrible executions threatened everyone who, even secretly, even in private or in a drunken mood, would think: is the king leading us to good, and are not all these torments in vain, will they not lead to the worst torments for many hundreds of years? But to think, even to feel anything other than humility, was forbidden...

The whole state was engulfed in terror. Empty cities and villages; the people fled to the Don, to the Volga, to the Bryansk, Murom, Perm forests. Some were intercepted by dragoons, some were bludgeoned by thieves on the roads, some were slaughtered by wolves. The fields overgrown with weeds, the peasantry grew wild, empty, the governors and commissars robbed ... And let the tsar's ax cut a window in the very bones and meat of the people, let the meek peasants die in a great draft, not even knowing why and who needed their life, let it crack from top to bottom all unawakening - the window was nevertheless cut through, but what happened was not at all what the proud Peter wanted. Russia, elegant and strong, did not enter the feast of the great powers. And pulled up by their hair, bloody and distraught with horror and despair, she appeared to her new relatives in a miserable and unequal form - a slave ... "

More can be said. To pacify the raging incessant war, Peter destroyed the old Russian state with a foreign invasion similar in detail to the tactics used by Lenin 200 years later.

Carrying out the plan conceived in Kukueva Sloboda, Peter's government, as it were, admitted that over 1000 years of their rule in the territory seized by the Rurik and Brothers trading house, they had not been able to establish themselves and subdue the seemingly meek and non-belligerent people. And the government openly called for help from Western Europe. Germans, Dutch,

British, French, Swiss, Poles and Swedes responded to this call in tens of thousands, pouring into the expanses of the newly founded Russian Empire, seizing key positions in state administration, in the army and navy, in the economy and trade, in education and culture, finally creating , that layer between the rulers and the people, on which the authorities could rely more or less reliably. More or less, but no more, because the environment corrupts, and the war captures, throwing it on one side, then on the other side of the front line. Many fell under the knife of the unceasing war even during the life of Peter, killed on the roads on the way to an unknown country, torn to pieces in riots and uprisings, ground by the terrible millstones of the terrorist regime, fallen in endless external wars. The new Russian nobility was drawn to them, or rather driven by the tsar's stick, forgetting their native language and customs, turning into a real occupying force in relation to the crushed people.

But the foreigners surrounding Peter felt no more secure than the boyars "destroyed as a class" during the time of Ivan the Terrible.

Right from the office of the great reformer, one could get to the gallows, to the chopping block, to the wheel, or even somewhere worse. One of the tsar's favorites, Willie Monet, the brother of Peter's old mistress, with the help of whom the young tsar was processed back in Kukueva Sloboda, allowed himself a slight flirtation with Peter's wife Ekaterina. What really happened there is unknown. Most likely nothing serious. But this was enough for Peter to send the old friend to the chopping block, and ordered his severed head, immersed in a vessel with alcohol, to be placed in his wife's bedroom. Shortly thereafter, the king died before reaching the age of 53. There were rumors that his wife had poisoned him, along with other favorites, who, seeing how yesterday's accomplices were going to the chopping block in succession, did not feel very comfortable.

It is not known whether any of those Dutch dreamers who thought about reducing the overhead costs for transporting Russian bread to Amsterdam survived until the death of Peter. If so, their disappointment knew no bounds. There was nothing to take out of the country. The country was ravaged to the ground. All those who created any material values in the Muscovite state were exterminated in wars and countless construction of bases, ships and fortresses, digging canals, laying roads. And the economy of the European type, despite the gratuitous and slave power, turned out to be completely uncompetitive in the world market. Not paying a penny to slaves is very tempting, but this leads to economic collapse and stagnation, which was known even by the ancient Romans, who died while trying to rebuild their state. But in Russia they forgot, because for a reminder of such things, a death was relied

execution.

They say that Peter, having managed to critically analyze his reign, made a will for posterity, and although many believe that this will was fabricated by Western intelligence agencies, its content suggests that no Western falsifiers were allowed to rise to such heights of thought and understanding of Russian reality. .

The understanding of Russian reality greatly distinguished Peter from such a utopian idealist as his forerunner False Dmitry I, who dreamed of carrying out the transformation by civilized methods.

Reviewing the work of his hands, Peter clearly saw that if he succeeded in anything, it was to turn Russia from a noisy, always fighting "wall to wall" and a village striving for chaos, into a huge military camp, where everything was militarized to the point of absurdity and squeezed on terror with a table of ranks. On such a foundation, Peter pointed out, it is possible to achieve the unprecedented. Namely, to conquer the whole world. Step by step, of course. Crush Poland, then Germany and Sweden, and there the evil old woman England, and one can say

done, since France in this case will capitulate herself. An army that can fight without food and boots, which can afford any losses, is capable of winning unthinkable victories even under the command of the most mediocre commanders, creating a myth of its own invincibility (for the fear of enemies) and making noncompetents incompetent in military affairs great commanders for greater glory stories. As for the people, the great reformer brilliantly pointed out that the people must be artificially kept in need, lack of rights and illiteracy, so that it would be easy to use and spend it for state needs. So that, pulled out of their miserable, hungry and disenfranchised village life, the people would not feel a big difference when they got into a front trench or some "great construction site", knowing that, wherever they were, they were equally destined to die of hunger and backbreaking work. Therefore, the main thing is constant terror in the country, if possible, continuous external wars, Peter taught, having outstripped Robespierre by almost a century and Vladimir Ilyich by two centuries, who for some reason thought in pride that he had come up with something fundamentally new.

After the death of Peter, under his successors, the Baltic Fleet, created by the volcanic energy of the mad king, rotted as unnecessary, never making its way from the Baltic Sea to the North to the Hanseatic ports and to Holland.

The fleet rotted, but the terror remained. First of all, in the best traditions, they dealt with the favorites and favorites of the late king. The head of the Secret Chancellery, Peter's right hand, Count Peter Tolstoy, whose name was pronounced only in a whisper that breaks from horror, was arrested. The eighty-two-year-old age did not save him from punishment with a whip and exile in the terrible underground prison of the Solovetsky Monastery. The police chief of St. Petersburg, Devier, was also beaten with a whip and sent to Siberia. And, finally, the Generalissimo of the Russian Army himself, a long-term employee of Peter and the uncrowned ruler of the country, His Serene Highness Prince Menshikov, together with his whole family, is sent to the distant Siberian town of Borisov, where he spends the rest of his life.

The defeat of the Petrine apparatus concerned only people, not the system. The miserable successors of the first All-Russian Emperor were well aware that they could not come up with anything better for an unpunished opportunity to suck the juices out of a vast country. Naturally, the Secret Chancellery also survived, which for the next three reigns was headed by the deputy of the arrested Count Tolstoy, General Andrei Ushakov, who still had to rise to the rank of count.

Terror and external wars - Peter's simple technique - were carried out to the best of his ability by his successors.

The reign of Empress Anna Ivanovna for some reason entered the history of our country as a period of especially terrible terror, as if peace and grace reigned before and after. "Even from a distance, at a distance of a century and a half," the historian writes, "it's scary to imagine this terrible, gloomy, difficult time with its interrogations, confrontations, irons and torture. no one knows where. For what? Once, about two years ago, he was talking to some suspicious person. What they were talking about is what caused all the anxiety, fears, tortures. Without the slightest exaggeration, one can say that going to bed in the evening, it was impossible to guarantee that by morning you would not be in chains and would not fall into the fortress, even if you did not know any guilt behind you. The number of victims of terror during the reign of Anna Ioannovna was enormous. They arrested, brutally tortured and painfully executed most of the Dolgoruky princes. Senator Musin-Pushkin had his tongue cut out and exiled to Siberia. The secretary of the Volynsky court, who translated several historical books for Volynsky, was severely beaten with whips. Volynsky himself, as is known, was executed after terrible tortures, having previously torn out his tongue and taken to the scaffold in a special muzzle, hoping in this way to hide the fact of pulling out his tongue from foreign ambassadors. Sergeant of the Semenovskiy regiment

Shubin, close to Princess Elizabeth, was rotting in a stone bag, tortured, flogged with a whip and sent to Siberia, without having obtained evidence against the princess. Princess Elizabeth herself - the daughter of Peter I - was expecting arrest from minute to minute, because sometimes against her own will she was drawn into a conspiracy "to overthrow" and conducted secret negotiations with the Swedes, with whom Russia was at war, which smelled very much of treason.

"Fear, despondency and despair possessed the souls of everyone, no one was safe about freedom and life. The nobles were deprived of their freedom, honor, property and life, and the common people and peasants from unbearable taxes, the untimely cruel right of arrears from the fatherland fled abroad. Peasants were ruined, they had nothing to pay taxes with. To help the trouble, they resumed their rights and began to subject non-payers to terrible tortures. Bailiffs, elders and landlords were thrown into prisons, cut out their nostrils and exiled to hard labor ... "

Soldiers of the regular army broke into villages and villages. They seized the best peasants, placed them in long rows naked and barefoot in the snow, and beat them cruelly on their calves and heels with sticks. They beat me until they beat out the arrears. "Many peasants," notes the historian of the reign, "bearing to endure such an order, fled. The villages literally died out. Measures had to be taken. The government recognized as the most effective means to grab all the suspicious, who kept in their mind the innermost thoughts of escaping. They were again severely beaten, tortured, raised on the rack. But the shoots continued, devastating entire volosts. The more daring and courageous of the fugitives of all kinds did not run far, organizing in the nearby forests into what for centuries in Russia was called "robber gangs", and later - "gang formations". "At the very accession of Anna Ivanovna to the throne," the historian states, "it was already noticed that the robber gangs in Russia are growing by leaps and bounds, and the inhabitants contribute to this evil, giving shelter to all kinds of vagabonds. When the court was in Moscow, in robberies and robberies took place in the vicinity of the capital. The robbers were so bold that they sent written demands to noble persons to deposit money in the appointed place and made threats in case of refusal. (The United States still did not exist, and racketeering in Russia was already flourishing). Petersburg itself, robber gangs multiplied to such an extent that the government was forced to send detachments of soldiers to cut down forests at a distance of thirty sazhen on both sides of the road from Petersburg to Moscow. entire special teams for the pursuit and capture of robbers. But the chief of these teams, Lieutenant Colonel Redkin, detained not so much the guilty of robberies as the innocent, in order to take bribes from them. They gave him a reprimand - that was the end of the matter, and the robbers in 1738 made themselves felt in the most ugly way on the Volga and on the Oka. They robbed merchants floating along these rivers, attacked landowners' estates and tortured owners and their courtyards with cruel tortures, smashed state customs and taverns, killed kissers and heads and took state fees.

Armed, not yet properly organized detachments operated throughout the empire. "In 1739," the historian of the reign calmly notes, "their gangs appeared in the counties of Keksholmsky and Olonetsky. It was indicated to pursue them with weapons and send those caught to Vyborg, where they would be executed by death. In the same year, the government found out that the crowds of the Russian people fled to Poland with the intention of forming a gang of robbers in a foreign land and appearing within Russian borders ... In St. Petersburg itself, thefts, robberies and murders spread - in the Peter and Paul Fortress they killed a sentry and stole the treasury. " In 1736, St. Petersburg was set on fire. Entire crowds under the pretext of fighting they engaged in looting and robbery with fire. Caught marauders were burned at the stake right at the crime scene. Moscow burned out again from malicious fires, where in one day on May 23, 1737, 50 churches and 2,500 houses burned down.

It was a terrible reign. Again impostors roamed Russia, who were caught and impaled. In the center of St. Petersburg, Captain-Lieutenant of the Fleet Voznitsyn was burned at the stake for converting to Judaism. He was burned along with Rabbi Barlev, who at one time was patronized by Peter himself. "But," as the Russian historian Karnovich correctly notes, "neither executions nor tortures of the era of Anna Ioannovna represented anything new that would not have been in use either before or after this era. This era inherited various methods of torture and bullying, which were only a continuation of what existed before that time, exhibited by some exceptional time of immense cruelty.

How similar it is to the version of the 20th Congress of the CPSU that all our incessant terror took place only in 1937 alone ...

To my surprise, I caught myself reading this rubbish and thought that if it goes on like this, then I won't be able to meet it in three days. Taking a sip of coffee, I began to flip through the pages faster. The next chapter was called "Terror without the death penalty", which described the era of Elizabeth Petrovna. I skimmed through this chapter.

The author drew an analogy with the period of the "cult of personality", when Stalin temporarily canceled execution for propaganda purposes. Then they quickly found a way out of the situation, mass killing prisoners with the help of hunger, cold and overwork on the "common fund". It was during the years of the official abolition of the death penalty that they came up with a way to transport prisoners half-dressed to the Far North in unheated freight cars and not feed them on the road. Upon arrival at the camp, other convicts tore off the corpses from each other with crowbars and dumped them into the pits. Something similar happened then. According to legend, being in the reign of Anna Ivanovna under the constant threat of arrest and death, Elizabeth took an oath that if she ever ascended the throne, she would not sign a single death warrant. After the death of Anna Ioannovna, having mutinied the guards, Elizabeth overthrew the infant emperor Ivan Antonovich from the throne, sent him into exile along with the whole family, and, according to tradition, began with the purge of the former state apparatus. The highest officials of the Empire were arrested, passed through the "wanted" and sentenced: some to wheeling, some to be quartered, and some, by special mercy, to beheading. The Empress did not approve the verdict, and right on the chopping block, the arrested were announced that they were exiled to Siberia. Powerful temporary workers like Baron, Osterman and Munnich ended their careers.

But everyone paid attention to the fact that the head of the Secret Chancellery, General Ushakov, not only was not arrested and tried, but was not even removed from his post, and after some time was granted the rank. Next came the quotations of historians, which almost did not differ from the previous ones, except perhaps in dates. Arbitrariness and intrigue: the power of Lestocq, his arrest and rearing. The power of Bestuzhev and his arrest. Favorites, riots, the appearance at the head of rampant gangs of landlords and fugitive officers. Massacres of rebellious peasants, repressions against Bashkirs and Kalmyks. Creation in Siberia of entire regions controlled by robbers. The first interception by the Secret Chancellery of "samizdat" under the title "The Truth of the Will of the Monarchs", which they wanted to take abroad in a tar barrel and publish there, so that Europe would know the truth about the situation in Russia and "perpetrate indignation against Russia, because there was no truth in Russia." Arrests for careless words addressed to the queen and her favorites. Flogged to death with whips, starved to death in unheated jails, stages to Siberia. War of estates with mutual artillery shelling. The executioner's pincers, tearing out the tongues of the court beauties Lopukhina and Bestuzheva, their whipping along with their relatives for the fact that both women dared to come to the court ball in the same dresses as the empress. And to top it all, as it should be according to the methodology, the beginning of the march to Western Europe - the Seven Years' War: nightmare

defeats and glorious victories. The ruin of the country. Bands of deserters in addition to bandits. The capture of Berlin and a new fire in Moscow. Epidemics and crop failures.

I quickly flipped through this section and settled on a chapter with the intriguing title "First Timid Attempt to Make Peace." It was about the accession to the throne after the death of Elizabeth, Emperor Peter III - the grandson of Peter I from his daughter Anna.

Born and raised in the West, the prince was horrified by what he saw in the inherited country and the orders reigning in it. Immediately ending the war, the new emperor, one of the first decrees, abolished the Secret Chancellery, banned torture, abolished corporal punishment for nobles and priests, banned the whip (only stick and cane), ordered the preparation of a project on the abolition of serfdom and the Code of 1649. Of course, such a tsar could not reign in Russia for a long time, and no one was surprised when, without reigning for even two years, he was dethroned and killed, and then denounced as an imbecile degenerate incapable of ruling.

At the head of the conspiracy, as usual, was the legal wife of Peter III - the German princess Sophia Augusta Tserbskaya - a purebred German by blood and upbringing, the smartest and most educated adventurer in spirit - one of the greatest women in the history of mankind, who took the name Catherine in Russia, whose descendants, perhaps not without reason, gave the title of Great.

Kukuev's dream came true completely. Russia was not only tightly fastened to the Western market, it not only succeeded in implanting the Western European way of life, introducing French as the second state language, but also placing a representative of the German ruling house on the throne. Now it was possible to speak about the complete purity of the experiment. The ferocious and eternally drunken Russian tsars died out, the extravagant, noisy and prejudiced queens died childless. In fact, the Romanov dynasty was interrupted, whose last name served only as a camouflage net for smart and rational Germans, who only in the third generation will be able to feel like Russians and learn to speak without an accent.

Catherine was too smart to repeat the mistakes of False Dmitry and Peter III. Stepping on the steps of the throne over the corpse of her husband, who was killed on her orders, she immediately became involved in a war that broke out with particular bitterness.

The Secret Chancellery was quickly restored: first as a Secret Expedition under the Senate, and then as an independent punitive body controlled exclusively by the crown. Stepan Sheshkovsky, a student of Ushakov, became the head of the Secret Chancellery. And, what is most interesting, the flowering of impostors began again, as in the Time of Troubles. Entire wars broke out under the banner of the murdered Peter III. "Never in the entire history of the Russian state," notes the historian of the reign, "even in the ferocious times of Ivan the Terrible and Peter 1, even in the insane times of Anna Ioannovna, there has never been such a number of executions, conspiracies, trials in Russia. According to the testimony of the Empress herself 14 conspiracies were uncovered in just one year preceding the execution of Mirovich! The most famous of them - Khrushchev's conspiracy (also in favor of Ivan Antonovich) - had more than 1000 supporters exclusively from nobles and officers. A monstrous government provocation that led to the murder of the deposed and languishing 20 years in prison of Emperor Ivan Antonovich (Following the grandson of Peter 1, the great-grandson of Ivan V, Emperor Ivan VI, is also physically destroyed.) Public execution of Mirovich, who carried out this provocation in the hope of returning the confiscated estate.

Bloody uprisings of Zheleznyak and Gonta. A terrible peasant war led by

Pugachev. Confederate uprising. The Confederates had their hands and togas cut off, their noses cut off, their tongues cut, their heads cut off. Public execution of Pugachev by quartering. Hundreds of his supporters quartered and suspended by the rib. Thousands and thousands of gallows in the Kalmyk, Kirghiz, Bashkir steppes. Thousands of soldiers who died under the stick. Hundreds and hundreds of wheeled Ural working people. A third of the population of the Empire with stigmas, like their own cattle, so as not to run and emigrate. The destruction of the last freemen in the Zaporozhian Sich and the spread of serfdom to Ukraine. Decree on the freedom of the nobility and the death sentence for Radishchev for a book that in very soft colors shows the true political and moral state of the country. "Over time, history will appreciate the influence of her reign on morals," Pushkin notes, "will reveal the cruel activities of her despotism under the guise of meekness and tolerance, the people oppressed by the governors, the treasury plundered by lovers, will show important mistakes of her political economy, insignificance in legislation, disgusting buffoonery in relations with the philosophers of her century - and then the voice of the seduced Voltaire will not save her glorious memory from the curse of Russia."

In the era of Catherine, the head of the secret office (called the "expedition"), as we have already mentioned, was a student and colleague of General Ushakov - Stepan Sheshkovsky. Whips, whips, sticks, just beatings during interrogations were quite common. Contemporaries were afraid of Sheshkovsky, like fire, no less than his terrible predecessors. Usually Sheshkovsky himself began the interrogation with an unexpected blow to the face of the person being interrogated with a cane in order to "amaze him." Contemporaries recall that Sheshkovsky himself skillfully, demonstrating his old skills, worked with a whip and lashes with elements of even some artistry. He was extremely pious. The torture chamber was completely lined with icons, in front of which, under the groans and cries of the tormented, Sheshkovsky read akathists to the sweetest Jesus with tenderness. Many could not stand the torture and "died their last breath", in the words of the historian. From the survivors, a signature was taken "under pain of death", confirmed by an oath that they pledged to no one, under any circumstances, not to disclose what was done to them in the Secret Expedition.

At the same time, Sheshkovsky also carried out scientific work: for the first time in the history of Russia (and, possibly, the world), he developed a system of the most severe tortures that did not leave visible marks, but turned the person being tortured into a physical and mental invalid. This system has been successfully used to this day. Radishchev lost consciousness only from one piece of news that Sheshkovsky would interrogate him.

Having almost unlimited powers, Sheshkovsky in the evenings went to some private houses and whipped the owners who fell for some kind of liberal chatter. Catherine everywhere encouraged such activities of the security service. Having plunged into the Russian war, she quickly lost her liberal views, differing from Anna Ioannovna only in her knowledge of foreign languages and greater cunning. Any criticism was severely persecuted, and even more so mockery of the Empress herself or her favorites. Two young ladies-in-waiting who drew a caricature of Potemkin were publicly flogged. Forbidding Countess Bruce to meet with one of the courtiers, the Empress somehow caught the young people together and ordered them both to be whipped right there, in front of her eyes. Once Catherine was informed that the wife of General Kozhin allowed herself to utter a few careless words in society. The Empress wrote to Sheshkovsky: "She (Kozhina) every Sunday is in a public masquerade, please (go there) yourself and, taking her from there on a secret expedition, corporally punish her and bring her back there with all decency." If this happened at the top, then one can imagine what happened below, when neither ranks, nor titles, nor the highest decrees on the "freedom of the nobility" gave any guarantees of personal inviolability and security.

"The story of Catherine's life can be divided into two parts: private crimes and public atrocities," the historian sums up this reign. But you have to give

a tribute to this woman: drawn into a war in a foreign country, orienting herself on the move, she perfectly used the technique, alternating terror and external wars. Having shifted the center of gravity of Russian expansion to the south and eased the pressure on Europe, she nevertheless managed to destroy Poland as a state, which Peter I pointed out from the grave as a priority. She was smart and always perfectly understood the situation, which was impossible say about her son, who occupied the Russian throne in 1796.

Fiercely hating his mother and all her deeds, having sat in the crown until the age of 44, Emperor Paul, who dreamed of transforming Russia on the model of his Gatchina estate, immediately found himself in a war against everything and everyone. Being a knight in spirit and mentally unbalanced by nature, he rushed with a spear at the ready into battle against a terrible monster - his own country and, naturally, four years later he was overthrown from the throne and brutally killed (beaten with boots, butts and hilts of swords) with the sympathetic silence of his own sons. "Everywhere a drum rattles, everywhere they beat with a stick, beat with a whip, troikas fly to Siberia, the emperor marches, teaches exponentially, everything is thoughtless, inhuman, ignoble, the people are still wiped out, crushed, robbed, wild self-will at the top - slavery, discipline, silence, fruit and the highest orders," the historian describes this short reign.

From Alexander I, apparently, considerable courage was required to take the throne, on which his grandfather and father were successively brutally murdered. Fiercely hating his father and actually participating in his murder, Alexander, while still heir, was full of good intentions with liberal democratic reforms to end the war raging in Russia. But already the first days on the throne showed him the unfulfillment of his dreams.

Sensing a liberal monarch, the state began to rapidly fall into chaos, and in St. Petersburg, according to contemporaries, "they began to talk about the need to kill the tsar as simply as they talk about the weather." Not having the strength to unleash real terror in the state, as required by the methodology, Alexander tried to replace it with incessant wars, but even here he failed - the army began to suffer defeat after defeat, which was not at all envisaged by Peter's methodology, because "the strongest chains for the people are forged from victorious swords.

The first few years of his reign are best characterized by a passionate and, of course, anonymous publicist leaflet, widely distributed in the capitals and provincial cities. It said: "The state of the state is terrible. A plague is approaching from Georgia and Astrakhan, all nomadic tribes up to the very Chinese border are in revolt. and are waiting for the signal for an uprising. High prices reign in the capitals, the outlying provinces are starving and suffering from a lack of workers as a result of recruiting and mobilizing spares. Taxes and taxes ruined all classes of society ... Two wars exhausted finances, did not bring any benefit and only contributed to the final ruin of the peasantry. The army has lost consciousness of its dignity, it has no confidence in its German commanders, it is poorly fed and poorly armed. With the fleet, the situation is even worse than with the army. Can the people trust the sovereign, who so deceived him? .. The new ally of the king knows not only all the secrets of the Russian cabinet, but also keeps spies in all the provinces of the state and is preparing an annihilating war for isolated Russia. Meanwhile, Russia is waging an inglorious war with Turkey, and the Persian War drags on without any success. At the same time, England and Sweden rise menacingly. And Napoleon is increasing his power, ready to rush at a weakened Russia at any moment.

It was enough to stop the wholesale terror, and everyone who is not lazy begins to teach the emperor and threaten him with letters like: "Sir, remember the fate of your father and grandfather. The same fate awaits you if ..."

The governors began to behave as if, in the apt expression of Kochubey, "there was no God in Heaven and no Tsar in St. Petersburg." Decrees ceased to be carried out, an unruly country, torn apart by ferment, lawlessness, uprisings and riots, government confusion, court squabbles and army lobbies, became a tempting target for foreign invasion. There has not been such an invasion since the campaigns of Batu Khan. Burnt cities and villages, trampled fields, burning forests, the flight of the population, howling packs of wolves on the roads, circling crows over the corpses of people, retreating in panic, an army taken by surprise, torn apart by generals squabbles. A desperate battle on the outskirts of Moscow, the surrender of Moscow, its fire and death. Thunderstorm of the 12th year! Executions and arrests to restore order in the rear. The murder and whipping of the dead Vereshchagin. Terrible winter, famine, counter-offensive, a campaign in Europe, the capture of Paris, the understanding that a poor and backward country cannot be a winner, even having won a terrible war. An attempt to turn Russia into a "depot of the world counter-revolution" (in a hundred years a more terrible attempt will be made to turn it into a depot of the "world revolution"). The militarization of the country based on the idea of military settlements, chaos, uprisings in the army, the creation of secret societies, conspiracies for regicide, more and more political, economic and moral collapse have been brought to the point of absurdity. A terrified king with obvious signs of persecution mania, already realizing his inability to manage the empire. And, finally, his unexpected departure to Taganrog, imitation of his own death and flight from the country under

fictitious name.

The military and police terror of Nicholas I. Dispersal of rebellious regiments with grapeshot, arrests of conspirators, suppression of the last attempt of the politically dying Russian guard to declare itself as a political force. The creation of the "Third Department" - a fundamentally new punitive apparatus - the forerunner of the post-Stalinist KGB in terms of all-pervasiveness and global surveillance. Whips, whips and gauntlets. The transformation of the country into a huge military camp, surrounded by gendarmes and police. The death of Pushkin and Lermontov, sending Dostoevsky to penal servitude, exile to the soldiers of Baratynsky and Shevchenko, declaring Chaadaev mad, Dolgorukov's arrest, Herzen's flight abroad. Suppression of the Polish uprising, wars with Turkey and in the Caucasus, saber-rattling throughout Europe. The horror of the Marquis de Custine, who arrived in Russia in 1839: "This country is in a permanent state of war. It does not know peacetime!" And I never knew, I should have added.

Riots and uprisings followed a continuous series and were suppressed with incredible cruelty. An eyewitness describes the execution of those responsible for the rebellion of one of the military settlements (in 1832): "There were about 300 people guilty in our district. The defendants, stuffed into heavy wooden blocks, spent time in prison until Lent in 1832, anxiously waiting for the final decision of their fate. Finally, the fate was decided: some were sentenced to be whipped on a so-called mare, and others to be driven away with gauntlets. A mare is a board longer than a human height, three inches thick and half a yard wide. At one end of the board is a cutout for the neck, and on the sides there are cutouts for the hands, so that when the criminal was laid on the mare, he clasped her with his hands, and already on the other side the hands were seized with a belt. The neck was also attracted by the belt, as well as the legs. The whip consisted of a rather thick and hard handle, to which was attached a braided whip, an arshin and a half long, and a 6-8-inch rawhide belt, four-sided, a pencil thick, was tied to the tip of the whip ... The time of execution came. Near her walked two executioners, guys of about 25, well-built, muscular, broad-shouldered, in red shirts, plush trousers and slouchy boots. The parade ground was cordoned off by the Cossacks, and the relatives of the convicts crowded behind them. At about 9 o'clock in the morning, those condemned to the whip arrived at the place of execution. Some of them were sentenced to 101 lashes, others to 70 or 50 lashes, and still others to 25 lashes. The sentenced were put on the mare in turn, so that while one was being punished, all the others stood right there and waited for their turn!). The first was laid out of those who were assigned 101 blows. The executioner moved about 15 steps away from the mare, then with a slow step began to approach. Whip trudged

between the legs of the executioner in the snow. When the executioner approached a close distance from the mare, he waved the whip high with his right hand, a whistle was heard in the air and then a blow ... The first blows were made crosswise, from the right shoulder along the ribs under the left side, and from left to right, and then along and across the back. From the very first time, the executioner cut deeply into the skin, and after each blow he brushed a handful of blood from the whip with his left hand. At the first blows, a muffled groan was usually heard from the executed, which soon ceased. Then they were already chopped like meat. After counting out 20 or 30 blows, the executioner approached a half-damask standing right there on the snow, poured a glass of vodka, drank it, and again set to work. A priest and a doctor were present at the execution. When the punished did not utter a groan and no sound, even signs of life were not noticed, then his hands were untied and the doctor gave him a sniff of alcohol. When at the same time it was found that the person was still alive, he was again tied to the mare and the execution continued. Not a single one died under the whip (they died on the second or third day after the execution). Meanwhile, each received a number of blows determined by the court's verdict. But the execution did not end with the blows of the whip. After the whip, the executed was removed into a mare and put on a drum. Some kind of sheepskin coat was thrown over the back, which looked like highly swollen minced meat. The executioner took out a brand from the box - something like a stamp made of sharp steel pins, and with all his might hit the convict's forehead and cheeks with this brand, knocking out the word CAT (orzchnik) on them. After removing the brand, blood oozed from the wounds. The executioner rubbed the bloody letters with some kind of powder, so that a black mark remained in each slot, forming a sign that remained for life ...

Punishment with gauntlets took place on another cloak, behind a ravine. Music played there all day long - drum and flute. Two battalions of soldiers, a thousand and a half in all, were built in two circles parallel to each other, in ranks face to face. Each of the soldiers held a gun at his foot in his left hand, and a gauntlet in his right hand. The authorities were in the middle and, according to the list, called out who should go out when and how many laps to go and how many hits to get. 15 convicts were summoned, at first those who were each followed by 2000 blows. They immediately lowered their shirts to the waist, leaving their heads open. Then each was placed one by one in single file in this way: the criminal's hands were tied to the attached bayonet so that the bayonet was against the stomach, and it is obvious: it was impossible to run forward, it was also impossible to stop and move back, because two non-commissioned officers were pulling the butt in front. To the sounds of a drum and a flute, the unfortunate people began to move one after another. Each soldier took a step forward from the line with his right foot, struck a blow and again stood in his place. The tortured man received blows from both sides. If someone fell and could not walk, then a sledge-sledge drove up, put an exhausted, dead man on them, and carried him along the ranks. The blows continued to be applied until the unfortunate man could neither gasp nor breathe. In this case, the doctor came up and gave a sniff of alcohol. The dead were dragged out behind the front. The authorities vigilantly watched the soldiers, so that one of them would not take pity and hit easier than they should. Among those present were fathers, brothers and other relatives of the punished. All spectators had a chance to endure terrible, perhaps more painful hours than those executed. But more than that, between the convicts and the soldiers who executed them, there were, as is usual in military settlements, close family ties: brother scourged brother, son tortured father. None of those punished with gauntlets were given less than 1,000 strokes. For the most part, they gave 2 and even 3 thousand blows. The Larich brothers, as propagators of rebellion, were given 4,000 blows each. Both died the day after the execution. However, many who were not executed died.

There was no official death penalty in the country. Many of the officials, as in the short Stalinist period, considered this a big disadvantage and asked Nicholas I, like Stalin's Abakumov, to return the mortal yuan. So Count Palen, governor of the Novorossiysk provinces, reporting on two captured Jews who were trying to secretly cross the state border, pointed out that only the death penalty could put an end to such crimes.

However, Nicholas I, unlike Comrade Stalin, did not allow himself to be persuaded, but drew

resolution: "Guilty to drive through a thousand people 12 times. Thank God, we do not have the death penalty and it is not for me to introduce it." Even if the unfortunate were quartered, it would apparently be easier for them than to die under 12 thousand stick blows.

Nikolai Pavlovich considered Peter I to be his ideal and, as best he could, imitated his idol, trying to use the methods he had inherited. He was related to the late converter by his incredible capacity for work - the tsar worked 24 hours a day, sometimes forgetting himself with a short sleep on a hard soldier's bunk. In war - as in war! He knew perfectly well that he was waging war. Despite the terror unleashed in the country, and perhaps thanks to it, Nikolai walked along Nevsky Prospekt without protection, bowing to the ladies. Not a single case is known even of an attempt to assassinate either Peter or him. He knew by face and by name all the janitors and policemen of Petersburg, all the officers of the guard and half of the army. His pen, spattering inkblots, crossed out the resolutions of the police officers on police reports and traced his own decisions about the punishment of some drunken coachman who knocked down some inhabitant on a dark street. He personally attended all the exercises of the army, navy and the gendarme corps founded by him. He himself drew sketches of uniforms, determined the gauge of railways, led the suppression of the Polish and Hungarian uprisings, wars with Turkey and Persia, pursuing an active and aggressive foreign policy, relying on an army of many millions.

He read all the books and magazines published in Russia, making decisions about the fate of both books and their authors. He himself draws up censorship rules, determining what can be written and what is not. "I myself will be your censor," he says to Pushkin, and even covers up the great poet when the security service, having created a special commission, is trying to find and "roughly punish" the anonymous author of the *Gavriliada*. The tsar personally leads a large-scale campaign to defame the book of the Marquis de Custine "Russia, 1939", which, in scope and involved state forces, can only be compared with a similar campaign to defame Solzhenitsyn's "Gulag Archipelago". Following all his predecessors, Nikolai tirelessly builds Bolshevik Russia, not yet understanding this. In Paris, the Russian ambassador wakes up the French Foreign Minister in the middle of the night. War? Oh no. It's just that in one of the Parisian theaters the play "The Death of Paul I" is being staged, which in Russia is officially considered to have died of apoplexy. The king asks to remove this play from the production. He asks very much, otherwise he will be forced to send 2 million spectators in gray overcoats to the premiere to boo the play. The play is filmed. It brings to the test. One gets the impression that Europe, weak and already demoralized by democracy, is a legitimate prey for a loudly clanging militaristic monster trained with a whip and gauntlets. The most favorable environment for the annexation of the Turkish Straits and the capture of Constantinople, which has become an obsession with Russian governments since the time of Catherine, when the Turks were forced out of the Crimea and driven beyond the Prut. It is not for nothing that all Russian tsars call their younger sons Constantine in the hope of placing them on the throne of Constantinople, creating a new royal branch of the dynasty.

The most brutal defeat in the Crimean War that followed, the death of the entire Black Sea Fleet, the capture of Sevastopol by the allies and the shameful Peace of Paris could give Nicholas the opportunity to correctly assess the essence of Peter's methods. But the king did not survive these events. Having learned about the landing of the allied troops in the Crimea and about the defeat of the army near Alma, where a line of Russian soldiers was literally shot from rifled fittings, who had not changed at all either in tactics or in armament since the Battle of Borodino, the tsar died (according to some reports - committed suicide), leaving his heirs to lead the country out of that senile impasse where he had led it.

The next chapter was called "The Second Attempt to Make Peace." His elder son Alexander, who replaced Nicholas on the throne, made a decisive attempt to achieve peace and civil accord in the country. The abolition of serfdom, military reform, vowel

legal proceedings, the birth of the Russian advocacy, bold projects of constitutional reforms, an attempt to reconcile even with Jews, the abolition of recruitment kits and corporal punishment - this is only a small fraction of what this monarch managed to do, remaining, for all that, an ordinary Russian tsar, for whom no laws were written. "Weak tsar," grateful Russia quickly realized and began hunting down its autocrat like a rabid wolf, fueled by the intelligentsia, which had gained freedom of printing, feudal reaction, horrified that it did not see a place for itself in the new Russia, and the overgrown royal family, frightened of not less than others and irritated by the eternal matrimonial adventures of his head. Alexander II survived seven assassination attempts, but the eighth still finished him off just at the moment when a project was already on his desk, essentially turning Russia into a constitutional monarchy. Alexander's activities interfered as much as they could. The new Polish uprising that broke out at the height of the reforms nearly nipped them in the bud; did not follow, and eight attempts on the king spoke for themselves.

The terrorist bomb, which shattered all dreams of peace and harmony in the country, led, quite naturally, to a new wave of government terror. The gloomy police and not very smart (not to say stupid) reign of Alexander III began, laying deadly mines under the future of the country. If the ideal of Nicholas I was Peter, then the ideal of Alexander III was Nicholas himself. But, alas, it was no longer possible to govern Russia by Nikolaev's methods, but the desire was so great that an attempt was made to throw Russia back half a century ago. Laws about the press, about censorship, about the police fell down. New laws "On insulting majesty" were introduced, as if written off from Brezhnev's 70th and 64th articles of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR. An insult to Majesty was recognized not only as an insult directly, but also in absentia, that is, directed at portraits, statues, and in general at any images of the Sovereign Emperor and Members of the Imperial House. Any plans for the life and health of the king, regardless of even the degree of personal participation in these plans, were punishable by death. Further, the law stated: "Compilation and distribution of written, printed and other compositions or images with the aim of inciting disrespect for the supreme power, or for the personal qualities of the Sovereign or for the administration of His state is punishable by hard labor for a term of 10 to 12 years." For the mere possession of such writings, a long prison sentence was supposed. The utterance of "impudent and insulting words addressed to the supreme power" was punishable by hard labor for a term of 6 to 8 years. Unlike Nicholas I, who freely walked the streets of the capital, his imitator decided not to risk it. The assassins of Alexander II promised him the same fate in specially printed leaflets, demanding the release of the terrorists who had thrown the bomb at his father's feet. The terrorists were publicly hanged, but the new tsar preferred to hide from surprises in the Gatchina Palace, guarded by all the rules of a besieged fortress. The government was clearly losing the initiative in the war. The tsar was quickly nicknamed the "Prisoner of Gatchina", because the "beloved and adored monarch" did not dare to stick his nose out of the fortress in which he locked himself from the people who "adored" him, being no longer able to launch a real Peter and Nicholas terror in Russia. Rare the tsar's trips to the capital or to the Crimea took place with the adoption of such security measures, which Gauleiter Koch did not resort to in the occupied territory in 1942. Long before the passage of the "Gatchinsky prisoner", soldiers with loaded live ammunition rifles were placed along the entire route for thousands of miles "These soldiers had to stand with their backs to the railway track, with their rifles pointed at the country. The railroad arrows were tightly clogged. Passenger and freight trains were driven into dead ends. It was forbidden for anyone to get out of the cars on pain of immediate arrest. Stations and station premises were locked and sealed, everything the management of the track passed into the hands of the security service. At the same time, no one knew which train the tsar was on, there was no "royal train" at all, but there were several trains of "extreme importance". They were all disguised as

royal" and no one knew which one was real.

From the besieged fortress, apparently, it was difficult to understand the situation in the country and the world. It was even more difficult to do this with an empty treasury and public opinion half-strangled in its cradle. Russia was once again treading water in a dead end of a police stalemate. There was almost the same graveyard silence as under Nicholas I. A thousand-year era of police stagnation. It seemed that nothing had changed in this country in 1000 years. "Russian time is slow, unfaithful and tedious; it stumbles over a huge empire, bogged down in its expanses, like a drunk in the invincible mud of a rural street. And no one knows where it is being driven - a thousand-year-old bearded Russian time. It wanders from the mists of centuries, breaking through with reeds the heads of the Tatars and Poles, crushing the neighboring khanates and kingdoms, acquiring, conquering, enslaving, burdened by their own booty - Russian time wanders from war to war, and wars stick out like milestones, measuring the terrible path of Russia, Russia, the Russian Empire. Wars and uprisings smoke blood and fires throughout the country, the first in the world in terms of space. The measured step of the Russian army steps with equal weight into puddles of foreign and puddles of Russian blood. Trihedral bayonets are stuck with equal force into German, Turkish and peasant guts. Drums beat the same even fraction in front of the players white feet of the imperial horse and in front of the trembling feet of the just hanged rebels.

But merciless time is already counting down the last years of the Russian Empire blinded by Peter. More dynamic and ferocious forces have long ago analyzed all the simple patterns of Russian life and are preparing to deliver a mortal blow. The government does not yet understand that it has lost the initiative in the millennium war. It is no longer able to unleash real terror, even after outright regicide. This is all taken into account, and the constant mistakes of the government under siege only hasten the fateful denouement.

The final chapter of the first part of the manuscript was called "The Last Attempt to Make Peace". At the very end of the 19th century, Russia received a unique chance to leave its centuries-old bloody path and finally achieve peace, harmony and prosperity. The country received this chance in the person of the new emperor - the last Russian Tsar Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov - Nicholas II, who ascended the throne after the unexpected death of his father in 1894. The new emperor was a completely unique phenomenon in Russian history. It is impossible to find even an approximate analogue to him, listing all the princes of Kyiv, the kings of Moscow, or, even more so, the emperors of all Russia. Quite unexpectedly, that same Russian intellectual appeared on the Russian throne, who had not yet existed in nature, who was timidly modeled with the help of fiction by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Kuprin, Klyuchevsky and Solovyov, Rozanov and Florensky. The appearance of such a person on the bloody Russian throne was a complete surprise for contemporaries. They didn't get to appreciate it. They will not be able to correctly assess it much later, dying by the thousands in Bolshevik dungeons and prisons, living in emigration or in the communal Soviet of Deputies. None of the Russian, and perhaps not only Russian, statesmen was so slandered and covered with concrete blocks of dried mud, as the last Russian emperor. Even having made your way with the help of jackhammers and explosions through a monstrous lie about this person, you simply come out with a lie, and then you get stuck in everyday slander and wild gossip. The company of lies began during his lifetime and reign - at first timidly: would they tear out the tongue, would they put them in jail under Article 246 for 12 years, and since nothing happened, the company gained strength, going beyond simple human decency. But it was about the autocrat! During the years of the communist regime, i.e., over the past 70 years, a mere orgy of dirt and slander fell upon the memory of the total person. Not a single Russian tsar aroused as much hatred among the new rulers as Nicholas II, which in itself was very suspicious. Analyzing the nature of this hatred, one can easily come to the conclusion that it is based on

desire at all costs to hide the most important fact of the biography of the last tsar - this man found a way to get Russia out of the terrible state in which it had been for a millennium. Moreover, he would have brought her out if the terrible mines laid under the country by his father had not worked.

The historical truth, if you approach it objectively, is as difficult to hide as the awl in bag.

For 23 years of his reign, Nicholas II never even raised his voice to anyone, although he had many reasons for this. He did not yell obscenities at the ministers, like his father, did not throw bent forks into the plates of foreign ambassadors, did not fight with a cane, like his grandfather, did not personally beat the cabbies and policemen in the face, like his great-grandfather. With everyone he was restrained, amiable and impeccably polite. He never (until the last minute of his life) lost his self-control and courage, did not throw tantrums, did not threaten anyone to rot in the fortress or in Siberia. He was higher than the slanderous company deployed against him and his family, never applying the law "On lèse majesté", not depriving a single person of freedom "out of court", that is, by his own will, to which he had every right, as an autocratic sovereign. He was the first tsar in the history of Russia, who realized himself as the head of state, and not the owner of a huge ridiculous farmstead. He sincerely loved his country and his people. Unfortunately, it was the country that turned out to be unprepared for the appearance of such a king.

He was not a drunken brute, like his father, a ladies' man and a sybarite, like his grandfather, a male and a martinet, like his great-grandfather.

He tenderly and touchingly loved his family and spent all his free time in her circle. At home they staged family plays, read aloud Garshin, Chekhov and Flaubert, laughed at Averchenko's feuilletons, took a great interest in photography, went hunting, quite rarely.

He was a modest and very shy person. His father did not have time to promote him to the generals, and Nikolai remained a colonel for the rest of his life, considering it immodest to promote himself to the generals. The case is just incredible. Comrade Stalin, for example, having no military education at all, unlike Nikolai, did not hesitate to put down 26 million soldiers and make himself a generalissimo.

Nikolay loved the theater, especially opera and ballet, often attended premieres, patronizing the artists. He maintained at his own expense theaters, museums, academies, lyceums, shelters and much more. Everything that bore the title of Imperial was maintained at his expense.

He played the piano, the guitar, sang and drew well.

He was unnecessarily merciful, gracious when it was necessary to execute. If this is not a portrait of a typical Russian intellectual of that time, who descended directly from Chekhov's pages, of which there were perhaps two hundred, or even less, in his life, then try to object to me.

He sincerely believed in God and was a bit of a fatalist (God's will for everything), he had no doubts about the truth of Orthodoxy, but he showed signs of religious tolerance unprecedented before him in such a military-clerical country as Russia. It was during his reign that the cathedral mosque and the choral synagogue were erected in the capital of the empire. He personally attended their opening. It was during his reign in St. Petersburg that they began to build a huge Catholic cathedral larger than the Parisian Notre Dame. One does not need to know Russian history well to understand what changes have taken place in the country and society against the backdrop of centuries of struggle with the Tatars and Turks, hatred of Jews and fear of the Vatican.

And for all that, he was very unhappy in life: his only son Alexei was terminally and mortally ill. The bouts of hemophilia could send him to the grave anywhere

minute. Imagine a father whose son may die at any moment, and perhaps this will be an additional touch to the portrait of the always calm, self-possessed and polite king.

Yes, even his fans object, he was a good person. He should be a regiment commander, a gymnasium director, a professor at the academy. He was not a king. He did not at all correspond to his position as Emperor of the All-Russian. Their delusions are understandable, since, we repeat, there was no such tsar in the history of Russia.

But who was the king? A tsar who is well aware of his role in the country, perfectly aware of the problems of the country and resolutely turned it from the hackneyed rut, which turned into a ditch swamped with blood and mud. With a sharp turn of the helm, the tsar led Russia onto the broad road of European civilization. The bitter nostalgia for old Russia that gripped most of the population of the USSR is not nostalgia for the times of Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Paul or Nicholas I. I assure you that this is not even nostalgia for the reign of the last two Alexanders, this is a completely clear nostalgia for a short period the reign of Nicholas II from the end of the Russo-Japanese War to the beginning of the First World War, when catapulted to the throne by the unexpected death of his father, the young monarch began to act independently, getting rid of his dad's noisy and stupid entourage, including a whole platoon of his brothers.

Nicholas was hardworking, like Peter and Nicholas I, carefully delving into all spheres of state life and international relations, but he saw the future of Russia in a completely different way than all his predecessors.

Of course, in a country like Russia, a real, merciless war began against such a tsar, gaining momentum as it became clear that the government, in the person of the Tsar, was looking for some civilized way out of the thousand-year impasse.

The stupid and aimless expansion of his grandfather and father to the Far East led to a catastrophe in the Russian-Japanese war, to the death of the entire Russian fleet, to the shameful defeat of the army and to a new terrible round of the thousand-year war, which took terrible forms. A time bomb exploded, planted by his ancestors. "It was a real war," writes the Soviet novelist, "with the rapid transfer of troops, with the march maneuver of the Semenovskiy regiment to Moscow, with encrypted telegrams to Tsarskoye Selo, with prayers and awards, with burning houses and drowned ships. The loss figure was good military figure: 65,830 people killed alone".

The war was terrible. Great princes, ministers, governors, generals and admirals, gendarmes and policemen, soldiers and Cossacks, workers and peasants, bankers and industrialists perished in it, factories and oil fields burned, bombs exploded in the Kremlin and in the center of St. Petersburg, Russian warships under the flag of rebellion came to foreign ports, forever dishonoring Russia. And through all this nightmare, Nicholas II led the Russian state ship from the terrible past into the civilized future, firmly holding the helm in his hands. If historians take great pleasure in making Nikolai responsible for Khodynka, Tsushima, for January 9, which is quite natural, since the head of state is responsible for everything, regardless of his personal participation or complicity in events, then why is it considered that everything positive that happened in the country in period of his reign, happened in spite of him, and not according to his will, not thanks to his persistent and wise public work?

And these are the facts.

Under Nicholas II, the Russian financial and monetary system was created. If quite recently, according to the apt expression of Saltykov-Shchedrin, for the Russian ruble abroad you could only get in the face, then in the reign of the last emperor, the Russian ruble

pressed the franc and the mark, overtaking the dollar, and pressed the pound sterling. At the same time, the finances were kept for the first time in the history of Russia in an impeccable condition. The excess of income over expenditure in 1908 in gold rubles was 30 million rubles, and in 1912 - 335 million rubles. All this was done without increasing the tax burden. In the reign of Nicholas II, by law of 1896, a gold currency was introduced in Russia, and the state bank was granted the right to issue 300 million rubles in bank notes not backed by gold reserves. But the government not only never took advantage of this right, but, on the contrary, ensured the paper circulation of gold cash by more than 100 percent.

The burden of direct taxes in Russia under Nicholas II was 4 times less than in France and Germany, and 8.5 times less than in England. All this led to an unprecedented flourishing of Russian industry and an influx of capital from all industrialized countries. Between 1894 and 1913, young Russian industry quadrupled its productivity. During the last four years preceding the First World War, the number of newly founded joint-stock companies increased by 132 per cent, and the capital invested in them quadrupled. The increase in the construction of railways amounted to 1574 kilometers per year (the highest indicator of the communists, achieved by 1956, was 995 km).

On the eve of the national catastrophe, Russian agriculture was also in full bloom. During the first 20 years of the reign of Nicholas II, the harvest of bread doubled. In the period from 1907 to 1913, the yields of the main cereals in Russia were one third higher than in the United States, Canada and Argentina combined (Never in the future under the Bolsheviks did this situation repeat itself!). During the reign of Nicholas II, Russia was the main supplier of food for Western Europe, especially for England. In 1908, 858 million pounds of grain and flour were exported there, and by 1910 this figure had increased to 2,820 million pounds. Russia supplied 50% of world egg exports. Wild and bearded Russian merchants were replaced by financiers and industrialists who graduated from Russian and foreign universities. The world's largest river fleet smoked along the country's rivers.

The silver age in art, the golden age of printing, freedom of speech unprecedented in history, the flourishing of journalism and newspaper and magazine business, the flourishing of theaters and museums - all this happened during the reign of the greatest tsar in our history - Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov.

It introduces the foundations of parliamentary democracy and free elections in the country. He closely follows these processes, knowing full well that the country is not yet quite ready for such transformations. Under him, an unprecedented program of public education is launched.

Universities and institutions of higher education are flourishing with a freedom they never had and never will have in the future. There are still legends about Nikolaev gymnasiums, real and commercial schools, and the level of education received there still surprises. By 1913, the total budget of public education reached a colossal figure until that time - half a billion gold rubles, and its growth rate over 20 years was 628 percent! At the very beginning of the reign, primary education in Russia became free, and from 1908 it became compulsory.

And how the face of cities has changed! What we see today in Leningrad, with the exception of several palaces of the 18th century and a few surviving unsightly three-story buildings of the same time, was built in the reign of Nicholas II, including most of the monuments, half of which were destroyed.

Russian science experienced an unprecedented flourishing. The names of Pavlov, Mendeleev, Popov,

Bekhterev and many others appeared in the reign of Nicholas. Russia has already started building the largest aircraft in the world, and on one of them, the Ilya Muromets, history captured the smiling tsar in the cockpit.

The reign of Nicholas II was a real RUSSIAN MIRACLE. The Millennium War was dying down and coming to naught. Such a scope for constructive and creative activity opened up that it captured the entire Russian society. The first tractors and combines were already moving across the fields. The construction of the Moscow metro and the design of the St. Petersburg metro began. Geological exploration reported on unprecedented oil reserves on the territory of the empire, and the archive preserved an interesting note, sketched by the emperor personally, about the possibility of distributing future oil revenues to the entire population of the country, which was supposed to raise the standard of living by an order of magnitude. Yes, there were many problems. Yes, Nicholas II made mistakes. But what he managed to do with the half-barracks-half-prison that he got, causes admiration for this modest and outstanding man, vilely slandered by his killers in the best traditions of Russian history.

If anyone ever wants to stop the war raging in Russia, then he should carefully study the methods of this autocrat, unprecedented in Russian history.

It is impossible to explain the miracle of the reign of Nicholas II. It is possible that Satan, who has chosen Russia as his testing ground, closed his eyelids for just a minute. But he woke up and looked at the range with surprise.

In the midst of Russia's creative march towards light and prosperity, a second mine exploded under it, laid by Alexander III. In what state of intoxication did the late tsar, for a loan of a billion francs, bind Russia with an alliance to France, which had lost its head from the revanchist frenzy? Wasn't it obvious to everyone who had eyes that France was buying Russian cannon fodder for her coming war with Germany over Alsace and Lorraine. God knows how many times Nicholas II wanted to get rid of this union, seeing its mortal danger, but inexorable fate led him to the catastrophe of 1914. France fought for its lost provinces in 1871, England fought for its world empire. And Russia? No one can even really formulate - for what? For the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles? For the idea of pan-Slavism, having Bulgaria among its opponents? Who dragged Russia into the world slaughter to save Western Europe? No, not to save Western Europe, but to return Russia to that bloody ditch along which she crawled either prone or on all fours for a thousand years. No matter how the Bolsheviks disguised themselves with pseudo-Marxist slogans, they represented exactly that feudal-serf reaction, to which all the reforms of Nicholas II were worse than death, and Russia, straightened to its full height, inspired horror and disgust.

As a result, something happened that inevitably had to happen in Russia with such a tsar as Nicholas II was. He was deposed from the throne and mercilessly destroyed along with his entire family. Immediately after that, the Russian Empire collapsed and ceased to exist. Power in the country was seized by a terrible terrorist organization led by a bloody maniac Vladimir Lenin. The country was drowned in bloody turmoil and unprecedented terror, in comparison with which the most ferocious terror of Russian tsars and emperors could seem like a childish joke. The death toll is in the millions."

Thus ended the first part of this, to be honest, terrible book. I had a pounding in my temples that had never happened before. Reading about the reign of Nicholas II - Nicholas the Bloody, I could not recover from amazement and indignation. Is it possible to distort the facts like that. Don't everyone know that... Thoughts were confused. Union of Workers and Peasants. Great Lenin. The people and the party are united. The USSR is a bulwark of peace and friendship of peoples.

Unable to put my thoughts in order, I fell asleep.

In the morning I opened the book again. The second part was called "Global War". It was possible not to read it - it was the usual anti-Soviet, which by this time I had read enough.

The essence of the author's reasoning, however, boiled down to the following. Even before the seizure of power, the Bolsheviks, having thoroughly analyzed the processes taking place in Russia, decided to end the thousand-year war in one fell swoop: the mass extermination of all those who could potentially participate in it. The task facing them was much more difficult than, say, the one facing Ivan the Terrible. But their means were more advanced.

It was necessary to destroy at least a good half of the population of the former Russian Empire, and the best half: the intelligentsia, the nobility, officers, officials and millions of peasants, in a word, everyone who did not fit into their model of a slave state, disguised by demagogic cries of universal equality and the construction of a new socialist society. And as Lenin rightly pointed out, "there is no such task that would be beyond the capacity of the Bolsheviks."

Right from 1917, the mass extermination of the country's population began - a terrible conveyor that worked around the clock for almost 40 years. The account went to millions and tens of millions of people. How the thin intellectual and cultural layer created over the last 20 years of the existence of Imperial Russia was licked off by the tongue. Millions of people fled the country. Those who dared to stay were ruthlessly destroyed. Layer after layer was removed from the former Russian society and thrown into the ditches and pits of mass graves. The rest were driven into the army and labor ranks, because the achievement of world domination was declared the official state doctrine. It changed forms from the "inevitable world revolution" to the "inevitability of the world victory of communism", but in essence remained unchanged. In fact, both Russia and the community that was called the Russian people turned out to be destroyed, because the "Soviet man" bred as a result of this inhuman mutation is just as unlike a Russian as a modern Italian is like a Roman - blond and blue-eyed, from the time of, say, Emperor Vespasian, that is, before the invasion of the barbarians. And only decapitated Orthodox churches - monuments of a lost civilization - testify that the existence of the Russian Empire was not a myth, like the existence of Atlantis.

It was an unprecedented massacre. Human history did not know such a mass extermination of people, and all existing terms are not able to describe what happened on the territory of the destroyed Russian Empire, which received the name of the USSR. Massacres, slaughter, massacre, genocide - all this well-known terminology does not in the least reflect the true state of affairs, the cosmic scale of crimes and oceans of shed blood.

Meanwhile, it was a continuation of the thousand-year war, which took on global dimensions. This was precisely the war, and the rulers in the Kremlin only seemed to be in control of it. The fighting, spilling over the Kremlin walls, gathered a bloody harvest there, in percentage terms no less than in any other places in the gigantic country.

In the thousand-year war that reached unprecedented ferocity, people's commissars, members of the Politburo, members of the Central Committee (sometimes in full force), marshals, generals and admirals died, almost the entire command staff of the army died, thousands of Chekists-NKVDeshniks-KGBists died, and their leadership simply turned into a kind of Corps "kamikaze", completely exterminated in the course of hostilities.

Factory directors, scientists and academicians, writers, journalists, poets, artists died in batches. The whirlwind of war destroyed the color of technical thought, including the creators and creators of the latest weapon systems. And ordinary people died by the millions, mainly workers and peasants. The latter were exterminated almost completely.

And, as always happened, in the midst of a suicidal massacre, a foreign invasion broke out on an unprecedented scale, unprecedented in cruelty, victims and other tragic consequences, from which the country, apparently, will never recover. 26 million human lives were claimed by this war. The figure is a nightmare, but it was about half the number of losses in the internal war in just the period from 1917 to 1941. But as soon as the external war ended, the thousand-year war raged with renewed vigor. This time, Stalin himself did not manage to survive, desperately fighting for his life all the post-war years. Again in this war, three ministers of state security perished, dragging their accomplices and associates with them, members of the Politburo and members of the Central Committee, secretaries of regional and regional committees, marshals, generals and admirals, scientists, writers, artists and millions of ordinary people perished. The country has turned into a huge camp zone.

And when, after Stalin's death, the naive Khrushchev wanted to end this war, he became the first head of the party and state to be overthrown by the conspirators from his post, but not shot. "Still, I did something," Khrushchev later said, "I was just sent to retire, but they left me alive and even free!"

Alas, it was too late. The conspirators who overthrew Khrushchev quickly realized that they had seized power in an already dead country. What this country had to endure for 1000 years of its existence turned out to be too much even for it, it seemed, ready to endure any amount of torment and humiliation.

And although the country was dead, the war on its territory continued. The crushed and mutated population, turned by merciless terror and poverty into something between prisoners and prisoners of war, soldered and genetically emasculated, continued to wage war with the authorities in the only way left to it: complete indifference to everything that happens in the country and the world.

Eternal fear of the authorities and eternal contempt for them, interrupted only by outbreaks of bloody hatred, led to the paralysis of the entire public life of the country, to a complete loss of understanding of statehood or any activity in the name of the public good.

The eternal fear of the people, the eternal contempt for them, the thousand-year habit of looking at the people as the cheapest expendable material led to the paralysis of power, its complete degradation and irresponsibility. If during the 10 short years of the brilliant reign of Nicholas II, Russia ranked from 3rd to 12th place in terms of various indicators of living standards, and absolutely first in terms of industrial product growth, and by a fairly solid margin, then by the time this study was written, that is, At the beginning of the 1980s, the USSR ranked 68th in the world in terms of gross product per capita, and 77th in terms of personal consumption, ahead of all countries in the world in terms of short life, infant mortality, the number of abortions, divorces and alcohol consumption. The continuous war of extermination, waged by the authorities with the people with unceasing fury from century to century, periodically led the state to collapse. The global war, launched by the communists in 1917 after the collapse of the Russian Empire, accelerated the processes of destruction of the state, which is already dead and disintegrating before our eyes

The nomenklatura elite, seeing and understanding this, began to behave as if on the eve of the Last Judgment, stealing everything that was lying badly, transferring huge values to the West, preparing their small people Nomenclaturia for the exodus from the country, feverishly looking for their Moses, who would allow the entire operation to be carried out without much loss.

Many preachers now scare the end of the world. Yes, the end of the world is coming, but IN A SINGLE COUNTRY, as Comrade Stalin used to say. No one knows exactly how many people died when Kievan Rus collapsed. But, judging by circumstantial evidence, a lot. When the insanely destructive energy of Peter destroyed Moscow Rus', creating the Russian Empire in its place, statistics already existed. Therefore, it can be said without much exaggeration that about half of the population paid with their lives for Peter's reforms, while the other half was ruined to the skin.

The collapse of the Russian Empire and 70 years of communist rule led to the death or flight from the country of almost the entire amateur population, who had risen under the sun of the reign of Nikolai Aleksandrovich Romanov. In 1894, when Nicholas II came to the throne, Russia had 122 million inhabitants. On the eve of the 1st World War, the population of the Empire increased by 60 million people, reaching the figure of 182 million, giving a previously unthinkable increase of 2.4 million people a year. Even without taking into account the increase in growth, which, by the way, is inevitable, it can be determined that by 1960 the country's population should have been approximately 300 million people, and it is only 215 million. 85 million people is the bloody bill that can be presented to the regime. And do not hesitate - it will be presented, since the USSR will exist for no more than 10 years and will collapse in the same way as the Russian Empire, Moscow into Kievan Rus.

And it is not difficult to guess what will happen after the collapse of the nuclear monster. The total extermination of communists will begin, of which there are 18 million in the country. Repression will fall on their families. In a deadly war the so-called allied republics will converge, still bound by the iron hoops of terror. According to the logic of the thousand-year war, this cataclysm, taking into account the possible use of nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons in it, can kill 200 million people and make the vast geographical area once called Russia uninhabitable for many years to come. Perhaps this is the only way to end the millennium war. By the end of the world in a single country. But a cataclysm of this magnitude on a sixth of the surface of our planet simply cannot but affect the rest of the world. When nuclear facilities begin to explode, ammunition depots fly into the air, nuclear submarine missile carriers sink, echelons with fuel oil and rocket fuel fly downhill, the world will face a problem that will be insoluble without direct intervention. The country will inevitably roll towards anarchy and chaos, burying the remains of its statehood and its population under the rubble ... "

When I entered Klimov's office, I was surprised to find that he was sitting at the table in military uniform. I had never seen him in uniform, and, under the influence of what I had read, I almost decided that a war had begun in those three days. But I quickly realized what it was. On Klimov's shoulders, instead of the colonel's, there were general's epaulettes.

"Congratulations, Comrade General," I said.

Klimov glanced from right to left over his shoulders, sighed and grumbled:

- I would gladly change my epaulettes for your youth, Vasily. But thanks anyway.

I gave him the book.

- Did you read it? the general asked. Did you read it carefully? What do you say?

I shrugged my shoulders and, trying to buy time to understand where Klimov was getting at, answered:

- If we are talking about initiating a criminal case for slandering our social system, then I think that ...

Why initiate a criminal case? The general looked at me with a strange look and repeated: "Why initiate a criminal case if all this is true?"

He paused and added:

However, the truth is much worse.

I remained silent because I didn't feel like speaking about it at all. I did not rule out the possibility that I was being tested for lice. You yaknesh something, and then prove that you are not a camel. I passed this damned book, thank God, and that's good.

— So what? Klimov asked. - Why are you silent? Or did he go through three days and not read a single line? Then say so: there was not enough strength to master this tome. The head is not designed for this. Please remove me from the authorities for health reasons.

I felt myself blush. I have this damned habit.

"No, Comrade General," I said. - I read it. Some places even read with interest. For example, about the reign of the last emperor. I can still agree with what happened in the history of our country. But now, excuse me, I do not see any signs of an imminent collapse of the state. It's not the first time I hear about it. Recently, many people have often said to me during interrogations: "Like, what are you doing there? The country is dying, and you are playing children's games: who read what, who said what. You are the state security service. The state is dying, and you are playing with toys." I always asked: "Where did you see this very death of the state, except in your imagination inflamed by enemy propaganda?" And they couldn't really tell me anything. They mumbled something from other people's radio voices and libels: Afghanistan, human rights, Academician Sakharov and the like. One witness, I remember, once said to me: "You are confronting the superpower of the 20th century, planting medieval thinking in the country. No one has ever been able to do this without destroying their own country." I asked him: "What kind of Middle Ages are you talking about, when we launch rockets into space, and nuclear weapons are our most powerful in the world, which even your beloved Americans admit." He looked at me in surprise and asked: "Do you sincerely think so? Or do you have a political conversation with me?" I told him that I sincerely consider our socio-political system to be the best and most durable of all that has ever existed and exists. If I thought otherwise, I would never go to work in the authorities. He laughed and said: "If you tell the truth, the Soviet Union has no more than 10 years left to live. If you're lying, then even less." And to be honest, Comrade General, I don't know what they see there, and I don't see any signs of an impending catastrophe. Of course, we have shortcomings and major problems, especially those associated with a drop in the level of Soviet patriotism, But.

- Well, what happened next? asked Klimov, smiling at the corners of his lips.

- Further? I asked. What are you about?

"Yes, about this witness," the general prompted. What happened next?

- Like what? I was surprised. - He signed, as expected, the protocol of interrogation and was released until the next call according to the decision of the investigation.

- Yes, I'm not talking about that, - Klimov grinned, - Tell me about the watermelon.

It seemed to me that I flared up like a blowtorch. Of course, I remembered this episode, but I didn't think that Klimov knew it either. Apparently, before being called to Moscow, I was enlightened to the very bones. Indeed, when I was interrogating this particular witness, one employee of our office poked her head into my office No. 13, who was delivering packages with food orders that came through our special distributor. I will say frankly that we, junior management officers, were not spoiled much, but they were not forgotten either. In the distributor it was always possible to buy at modest prices what was either not available on the open market at all, or was very expensive. None of us considered such service to be any special privilege. We did not have time, sometimes working around the clock, to run around the shops. And our wives should not have done this, so as not to have a negative impact on us. So, it was at the beginning of June, and watermelons were brought to us (I don't know from where) and in such quantity that even we, ordinary investigators, got a whole watermelon with a makeweight.

They put a watermelon in a plastic bag for everyone and carried it to the offices. Do not waste time for us to stand in line somewhere? They brought it to my office. I put the bag on the edge of my desk, thinking how happy my girls would be when I got home from work today. And the witness suddenly pointed his finger at this watermelon and said: "That's what you are working for in June, Vasily Viktorovich, and not for some idea or social system. So, mark my words, that you, the person responsible for the security of the state, you are selling this very state for a watermelon.

- Well, what did you answer him? Klimov asked with a laugh.

Since there was no doubt that the general knew everything, I told him everything as it is, and told him:

- I answered him that if we were not bound by official relations as an investigator and a witness, I would have slapped him in the face for such words.

"I remember," the general laughed, "a whole transport of watermelons came, it seems, from Gabon for distributors of the Central Committee and regional committees. And our guys intercepted a whole echelon for themselves. It was the communists of Gabon that sent us, at the rate of four watermelons for each Kalashnikov assault rifle.

He laughed again. I was silent.

"Here," Klimov said seriously, "how much noise there is because of some stinking watermelon. Like savages. They saw a watermelon in May and the investigator and the witness almost got into a fight. And watermelons, if you want to know, ripen all year round in different climatic zones of the world and they are delivered throughout the year to stores in the West, and not only in August, as we do.

- So what? I asked, completely bewildered. - That I stole this watermelon from someone? Or specifically requested it for yourself? I don't need him, Comrade General. Even if he was not there all year, and it is not necessary. Brought in June - nice, of course. So I didn't try it - I took everything to my daughters.

"You've done well," the general said. - And the worker is a good, and the family man is excellent. And you don't need a watermelon. You don't need it, but I do. And, every day. I, Vasya, love watermelon, but I have been toiling for a whole year - because it is not there. It's good, what do you think?

"Well, why did he cling to this watermelon," I thought. "It's as if I dragged this watermelon off his table."

- Do you have a car? the general asked, suddenly changing the subject.

- How do I get a car? I was genuinely surprised. - The apartment was barely given after the birth of the second child. I don't even think about the car, Comrade General. Do not interrogate the government official! You have to take a taxi for searches, and you only pay for them in six months. And so - at your own expense. The whole team is thrown off by 10 rubles. And witnesses must be taken home. And home by tram...

"Here," Klimov interrupted me. "You are all correct. I know very well how you live and how we all live. Why does this happen, have you ever wondered? You, a Chekist, a soldier of the party's combat detachment, working for the sake of its security day and night, as they say, not sparing even life itself, should you roam about like that, and every Jew can reproach you with a watermelon?"

"So I should have shot him for that?" I tried to laugh it off.

"Yes, it's not about him," Klimov waved his hand in annoyance. It's never too late to shoot him. It's not about that. You see what is being done in our closed stores? Every year the assortment is poorer and poorer, and not only with you, but also with us, senior officers, and even with the leadership. And what is there is completely foreign. From the United States to Israel and South Africa. What does it all mean, can you understand? This means that the country is dying, if not already dead. I don't know who these wise men from the Central Committee hired to write that book, but it doesn't say everything yet, how a dying man is crushed with an American boot, his guts are squeezed out, and he is not able to move a finger ...

The general blushed. He took a decanter of cognac from a side table, poured a quarter of a glass, drank it in one gulp, and continued:

- I specifically, Vasya, gave this book to read so that you understand a lot. I saw how you suffered, taking top secret material out of the department, thinking that I was preparing some kind of cover for you. You shouldn't have thought so. By youth, by inexperience. If I need to spank you, then I will simply order you to be taken to the basement and that's it. And to his wife - he died in the line of duty due to his own negligence, so that he would receive half the pension. And any other can also be issued - our rights are huge, unlimited. Another thing is that we do not use them now, because we do not need it. But it is all the more offensive that we live with such rights and opportunities, like the unemployed in the States on welfare. We all live in shit. And I want to live like a human being. In other words, if a country is doomed, then so is its fate. This is not the first time this has happened to our country. But the party, Berkesov, our party must live and live even better than it lived before.

The CPSU, Vasya, is a huge force. This is such a force that no one in particular can comprehend or understand its strengths and possibilities. This organization, created and shackled by the genius of our leaders, will survive the global fire, and even a cosmic cataclysm, and even more so it must survive the collapse of the USSR. I, Vasya, have been a communist, one might say, since my schooldays, and I would never trade my membership in the party for anything, for any good. And I will die for her cause without hesitation. When I say "party", when I talk about the genius of its leaders, then don't think that I mean that, pardon the expression, ideological garbage that was invented to fool the population. She is so stupid that, as you know, several tens of millions of people had to be killed in order for the survivors to pretend to believe in all this. Now we don't care if they believe in all this nonsense or not. We no longer need either Lenin or Stalin. We no longer need the name CPSU. It is important for us to preserve the party - an organization of a new type, as Lenin used to say.

- What will it be called? I dared to ask.

"It doesn't matter what it will be called," the general laughed again. - Maybe not at all

will not be named. Or, say, "International Investment Fund". The name is not the point. The point is to keep all our wealth and power, throwing off the old skin and all the old labels. Let them be trampled, shredded, judged, cursed, whatever. And we, under a new sign or without it at all, will start a new life, not answering to anyone for anything or anyone.

"I'm not sure," I said, choosing my words carefully, "that everyone in the party will like this idea," and I thought that for many the opportunity to put someone in jail with a phone call or alert Dzerzhinsky's division is much sweeter than a watermelon even in the month of March but he didn't say it out loud, of course.

"This is the general line," Klimov said harshly. - The best forces of the party will be involved in its implementation. Do you know what they do with those who resist the general line of the party? They end up in jail or the next world. We have selected the best forces in the KGB for the tasks ahead. This does not mean that there will be no resistance within our department. We, too, have plenty of assholes who, without a portrait of Lenin, feel like girls with their hem pulled up. But you can also get along with them. And that's why. If you carefully read the book that I gave you, you could understand that throughout history it was possible to keep the people in fear and fear by almost the same methods.

obedience and somehow manage them. However, when the state could not stand it and collapsed, the state elite also made huge sacrifices. The Troubles, when the tsars perished and almost all noble Russian families were exterminated, the Petrine reforms, which finished off the boyars and the old aristocracy, actually destroyed the Romanov dynasty itself, and, finally, 1917, when everything was destroyed along with the tsar: the nobility, the intelligentsia, the state apparatus and even the peasantry. Do you realize what could happen now if we don't take all precautions in advance? You do not want your wife and daughters to be raped and killed in front of your eyes, and you yourself hanged upside down on a pole? Do you remember the events in Hungary in 1956? Did you see what they did with our brother? And everything will be even worse for us. Therefore, we are forced to take all measures in advance. I think we still have 10 years, plus or minus a couple of years. But there is an incredible amount to be done. Do not think that you will act alone, but you are one of those selected to save the party. New people will appear in command posts, but they are all carefully selected or will be selected, like you. Do you understand me, Vasily?

My head went in a spiral.

"Allow me to report, Comrade General," I began uncertainly. "But we, as Chekists, must resolve all doubts through a free exchange of opinions. You stunned me, and I have a lot of questions, if I may ...

"Speak," Klimov allowed.

— And what about our army, strategic weapons, fleet, scattered on the four seas? And finally, our enemy? He will destroy and occupy us as soon as he sees the first signs of our disintegration. I will allow myself to assume that if the leadership saw signs of a crash, then the enemy saw them too, or will see them in the very near future. Will he give you the opportunity to act according to the plan? Will he, together with the USSR, destroy our Party and all of us?

Klimov smiled slyly:

- Do not be afraid. Here, as the people say, everything is under control. We will do everything in such a way that not only will they not interfere with us, but they will also pay for half of our events at their own expense.

I had some more questions. There were a lot of questions that raced through my head, but at that moment the phone on Klimov's desk rang. The general picked up the phone and said: "Yes, yes. I understand. Let's go now."

He opened the closet, pulled out a civilian jacket that was hanging on his shoulders, took it off, hung a uniform jacket on his "shoulders", hid it in the closet and put on the jacket.

"That's it," Klimov sighed. And you can't brag. Doesn't like leadership when we walk around in uniform. Just in front of the mirror and admire.

The general looked me up and down with a critical look and said:

- Went. Be young.

In the waiting room, Klimov threw the ensign on duty: "I'm to the leadership," and we went out onto the red carpet of a long corridor. We went somewhere on the elevator, which, having stopped, released us into another elevator. He, in turn, went somewhere and opened the doors on the other side, revealing a blank door with a code of numbers resembling a telephone dial. Klimov dialed a few numbers, and the door slid aside. We entered a room that looked like a rest room. Walls of Karelian birch lined with bottles and packs of Western-made cigarettes. A sofa with a rug casually thrown on it. A low table littered with foreign magazines. A thick book in English with a bright title against the backdrop of the Spasskaya Tower: "Devil's Alternative". I did not have time to read the author's last name. Nearby were some pills and vials of medicine. In the opposite corner, a huge TV set adorned with a golden ornament of hieroglyphs gleamed with a screen. On the wall in a strict frame is a portrait of some bearded Jew or Armenian (later I learned that it was a Greek) in a bowler hat and an old-fashioned tie.

I noted all this mechanically, following General Klimov, who went up to a small door in the opening between two polished walls, opened it and, saying "Permission?", entered the adjacent room. I followed him.

Suddenly, my mouth went dry and I felt the blood throb at my left temple.

Andropov was sitting at a small desk, the mirror surface of which reflected a large portrait of Dzerzhinsky hanging between the windows. He was wearing an American T-shirt with a picture of a cowboy with a lasso circling over his head and with the words "Welcome to Northwestern University" written in English.

But what struck me even more was the fact that Misha Yermeev was sitting at the side of Andropov, lounging in an armchair, without a jacket and with an untied tie. He and Andropov were talking about something in English, interrupting the conversation when we appeared. At the same time, Eremeev said in Russian: "Very good, Yuri Vladimirovich. Not bad at all. You still have a slight accent reminiscent of Latin American. But half of America lives with such an accent, especially in the south and southwest. So you can be right tomorrow throw behind enemy lines.

Andropov laughed in a low, dry chuckle, without getting up, offered his hand to Klimov and pointed him to an armchair. Klimov, before sitting down in a chair, shook hands with Yermeev. He got up, came up to me, extended his hand and said: "Sit down, Vasily Viktorovich. Don't worry. Do you want sparkling water?"

Without waiting for an answer, he took a soda siphon, poured a glass and handed it to me.

- Thank you. Don't," I whispered through dry lips.

Eremeev shrugged his shoulders and drank the glass himself.

- Who is this? Andropov asked, pointing his finger at me.

I jumped to my feet and reported:

— Captain Berkesov.

- From the Leningrad Department? Andropov's watery-gray eyes probed me, as it seemed to me, to the very core.

- Yes sir. From the Leningrad Office. Senior Investigator, I reported.

- Did he graduate from your infantry school? Andropov turned to Klimov. - "That's right!", "Captain Berkesov." Togo and look now the combatant will go around the office.

He looked at me again.

Can you speak human language?

I was silent. My face was on fire.

"A man is worried," Klimov answered for me. - I saw you for the first time not in a portrait and I'm worried. What is unusual about this? The comrade is still young, and you are right at him like a tank ... Yes, I am a tank, - Andropov laughed again. — Only now the engine of this tank is not the same. The engine is roaring." He put his hand to his chest, then forced the smile off his face. Is he instructed?

"In general terms," Klimov replied. — I read the book, and I personally talked with him several times. And Comrade Yermeev too.

Is he ready to participate in the event? Andropov's voice was dry and hard.

- Are you ready? Klimov asked, turning to me.

"That's right," I replied, still standing.

Although Andropov had already reprimanded me for "so exactly," I could not find any other words in this situation.

"He has a vocabulary like Marshal Kulikov's," Andropov remarked more good-naturedly. - In addition to the mat, only "so exactly" and "no way." What school did he graduate from? - the Secretary General turned to Klimov. — Ryazan? Mogilev?

"Yes, he did not finish any school," General Klimov answered with resentment in his voice. - He graduated from the university. LGU, law faculty.

One might have thought that Andropov did not know this.

"It can't be," Andropov was amazed. "I've noticed before that law schools at Universities turn out ready-made paratroopers. Lawyers come out, as after special forces courses. Is it good or bad? What do you think, Klimov?"

"I'm not supposed to think," the general joked. - Yes, and I finished, as you know, the Agricultural Institute in Stavropol.

"In Krasnodar," Yermeyev prompted.

"Yes, that's right," agreed Klimov. - In Stavropol, I studied at the branch. In a branch of a cunning institute.

"All right," Yeremeev said. - They joked and that's enough. Come on, Yuri Vladimirovich, let's talk about the case, otherwise Vasily Viktorovich will soon have a trip to Leningrad.

I personally had no idea whether I would go home today or not.

There was silence.

"Captain Berkesov," Andropov began to say dryly and distinctly, "among the many officers of your department, you have been selected for a set of qualities, both personal and official, to carry out the event, the essence of which General Klimov introduced you to. The main thing in this operation, as in all operations carried out by the Central Committee and the KGB, is absolute secrecy. In connection with the scale of the event, the code name of which is "Perestroika", it is very extremely important that no one notices that our party is moving into a new qualitative state. Since there is too much at stake, it is necessary to act decisively and quickly. Everyone who is even potentially able to notice and correctly assess the processes taking place in the country should be temporarily isolated from society. First of all, those who are listed in the auxiliary and spare file cabinets, the printing of which has already begun. To form new camp zones and new subdivisions under the Directorates, shifting the center of gravity to their activities. Ruthlessly use Article 70 of the Criminal Code. Take everyone, regardless of social status or the need for a particular person in any field of activity. Whether he is a candidate of sciences or a doctor, or even an academician, if he is potentially dangerous or somehow does not accept our party as a leading and guiding force in society, isolate him for about 5-10 years. Upon your return to Leningrad, you, Captain Berkesov, will lead a special investigation team to carry out this task. The secret order, as well as the order to promote you to the rank of major, has already been sent to General Blier. Just don't shout "I serve the Soviet Union!", but answer: do you understand the task and its importance?

I almost blurted out "so exactly" again, but overcame myself and answered: "The task is clear, Comrade General Secretary."

"An intelligent guy," Andropov said. - Once the task is clear, then everything. You will receive special orders through the head of your leadership from me personally or from General Klimov ... - he paused, and then added, pointing to Yeremeev. Or from him. You can go.

"Wait for me at the door," said Klimov.

I had already turned to go when I heard Andropov's voice: Major Berkesov!

I turned to face him again.

"You will be a general," Andropov said, piercing me with his eyes. - Take my word for it. Go!

I finally came to my senses only when I returned to General Klimov's office.

"You've done well," the general said. - He behaved correctly. And Comrade Andropov obviously liked it. How he joked with you, even I was surprised.

"Wow jokes," I thought. "A lot, probably, he brought his jokes to a heart attack."

"Comrade General," I asked. - Allow the question?

Klimov nodded his head.

- This book, which you ordered to be read, can it really serve some kind of

methodology? Maybe there is a way to end this war. Now in my head everything that I have read is gradually being put aside, and I think, maybe, what kind of research should be done on this issue, the relevant institutes should be involved. Basically, find a way out.

"Don't be smart," ordered the general. - You might think that we did not rack our brains over this issue. Nothing will come of it. As soon as we turn into liberals now, declare all freedoms and the like, they will immediately tear us all to pieces, and the country will fall into chaos, instinctively striving to return to a pre-state state. This is exactly what the author noted. What we have now conceived is also a huge risk. And most of all, Yuri Vladimirovich himself risks. So much crap has accumulated in the party. Many sense the end and so row under themselves that if you give them free rein, everything belonging to the party will be dragged into holes. Yuri Vladimirovich now ordered all the stolen goods to be handed over or it will be bad. So they've been running around like rats and it's not yet known how things will turn out. But you do as you're told. We'll figure it out inside. No one from outside would interfere with us.

Returning to Leningrad, I eagerly set to work. We worked almost around the clock. The investigation and processes went on in a continuous conveyor.

The zones and camps were crowded with everyone who could even potentially prevent our party from moving into a new qualitative state. It would be primitive to think that the KGB dealt only with arrests. Gigantic work was carried out to redistribute the gigantic wealth of the USSR, which completely belonged to our party, according to various new structures both here and in the West.

My career was moving up by leaps and bounds. I was pleased. The leaders of the country and the KGB changed, but the goal remained unchanged. The KGB was the first to notice the fire in the hold of the state ship and clearly led the matter to rescue the cargo and passengers of the 1st class. Let the rest be saved as they wish. Like on the Titanic.

Only one elite should live in this country. The people, if they do not agree to be a dumb and obedient slave, are not needed at all. For a thousand years, he has already done for the elite almost everything that was required of him. And now its remnants may die out. And who will work? Yes, no one. Europe and America will work here on the terms that we dictate. And the elite will receive money from everyone and live as it pleases. I understood the global purpose as I moved up the corporate ladder and realized that I would serve the new cause with the same zeal as the cause of building communism.

But when the Soviet Union collapsed, I immediately felt that many processes were getting more and more out of our control. We could not foresee a lot in our plans, mainly because, considering ourselves a monolith, we were not. The party, the KGB and other seemingly reliable structures immediately split into many unequal parts. The country instantly found itself occupied by the dollar, against which we simply did not have the means to fight. All that was left of our superpower began to rapidly plunge into chaos, wrapped in the Stars and Stripes. But we still kept the situation under some control. The absence of a party and state ideology choked us, preventing us from working effectively. We were sliding down to the level of ordinary police and desperately trying to come up with a new methodology for the global management of society.

But some unknown force every day more and more deprived us of power and influence. We desperately resisted, fomented armed conflicts, both on the territory of the USSR and beyond its borders, by all means brought to a standstill everything that was left of the economy of the former USSR, trying to drive a new life into the channel of the planned dark tunnel.

All these years, one thought has tormented me: who is this Ereemeev. I met him a few more times in Moscow, sometimes I received instructions from him by phone or HF. But only when I became a colonel and head of the Investigation Department did I find out who he was. And he doesn't seem surprised. So it probably should have been.

Then I became head of the Department and soon, as Andropov once promised, I will become a general. When this issue was being decided, I nevertheless reminded Klimov that he was very famous in the city and my appointment as head of the local KGB could cause an explosion, which unwanted.

"Don't be afraid," Klimov answered in his usual way. - Everything is taken.

And indeed, when the news of my appointment was published, several newspapers squeaked, some fuss began in the stinking committee on human rights and in the Zionist society "Memorial", but that was the end of it. So we still have enough power.

Once Klimov called me by direct phone from Moscow, who was already expecting a promotion from lieutenant general to colonel general.

"Vasya," he said. - Have you forgotten your friend Misha Ereemeev yet?

"I remember," I answered without any emotion.

"I don't know where he's going now," the general continued, "but he's definitely going to visit you in Leningrad, that is, in Petersburg. Apparently, our new friends may start hunting for him. So you lead them by the nose, as best you can, and don't let go of their guys eye.

"Understood," I said without any enthusiasm. The forthcoming appearance in the city of Ereemeev did not please me at all. So, you have to quit everything and deal only with it. Moreover, I had instructions to follow all his orders. But what the general said next was even more interesting.

"As for Ereemeev himself," Klimov continued, "there is such an opinion: a man who has done so much for our country deserves the right to be buried here. Do you understand me, Berkesov?

"Understood," I replied. - Will there be a scandal?

- Try not to. Klimov chuckled into the phone. - Do it yourself. Don't entrust anyone. Lure him into the "nine" - there you can skip the elephant through a meat grinder and no one will notice. And take him to the third crematorium yourself. Hang a green tag and that's it. Understood?

- And if he does not go to the "nine"? I asked.

- Are you small? - the general began to get angry - Make it so that he went. This is paramount, as the late Ilyich would say. We need to finally put an end to that 1982 operation. Why is he better than Kruchina?

"Understood," I repeated for the third time.

"Well, all right," Klimov said kindly. "I have good news for you, there are two papers on the president's desk. One from us: about awarding you the rank of major general. The second from our old friend Sergei Kovalev about depriving you of all ranks and declaring you a state criminal. What paper do you think the President will sign?

Klimov laughed and hung up.

To lure Yermeev into the "nine", of course, was not difficult. He was there often, because in the "nine", as one of the most secret appearances was called, meetings of national importance were repeatedly held, which could not be held in any other place without leaking information.

But I firmly decided that I would not go to the "nine" alone. I frankly gave the order to remove Yermeev, but I can't guarantee at all that not Eremeev, but me, will be removed from the "nine".

There was only one person I could take with me. He was not yet in the city, but I was sure that if Eremeev appeared in the city, he would also appear. I firmly decided to call him with me. He despises us all so much that he is absolutely not afraid of anything, as if he were not a man, but a spirit. And he will have nothing against if I liquidate Yermeev in his presence. But no one dares to kill me in his presence.

I end my notes in the maelstrom of an ever-intensifying five hundred year war. I did not start this war and it will not end with me. But I honestly described the fragment in which I personally took part. I feel like something is about to happen to me. Otherwise, Klimov would not have started talking about the papers on the president's desk. Therefore, it only remains for me to do what many participants in this war did, driven into a deadly dead end by its logic: to pack this manuscript and make sure that it, having fallen into reliable hands in the West, was published. Perhaps, reading my notes in the future - notes of a KGB general - someone will think of a way to make peace in this unfortunate country.

Vasily Berkesov

St. Petersburg, October 199....

American publisher's note

Perhaps readers will get the impression that Mikhail Eremeev is me. With all categoricalness I declare that this is not so. While working for the United States government, I have always acted legally and under my own name. In addition, of course, I never saw Andropov, and even more so - I never attended any meetings with his participation.

If in those years there were some contacts between the CIA and the KGB, then they could not be carried out through the Moscow residency. This should be clear to anyone who understands the logic of superpower confrontation.

As for the book itself, Five Hundred Years of War, it seems to me that it never existed. Most likely, it was written by Berkesov himself, who, as far as I managed to get to know him, was inclined towards literary and historical pursuits, although he was embarrassed by this. The late general was, in his own way, an honest and deeply feeling man. He was not the dumb automaton performer he was sometimes portrayed in the Democratic papers. He deeply experienced and analyzed the processes taking place in his country, which are regularly led Russia to a dead end and to death. So he could well have written this book. Specialists in Russian history, to whom this book was given for examination, came to the conclusion that this

a compilation from rather rare, but open sources, to which everyone in Russia had access, and even more so a KGB officer.

Nevertheless, the notes of General Berkesov "The Five Hundred Years' War" are of undoubted value in their original approach to Russian history in an attempt to make a correct diagnosis, which makes it possible to determine the optimal medicine. If the Russians themselves have not been able to conclude peace for centuries, it may make sense to turn to the peacekeeping efforts of the world community, which is still gaining experience in the burning outskirts of the former USSR. By joint efforts, perhaps, it will be possible to reconcile this mysterious people and the Varangians, who so carelessly came to Rus'. As for Berkesov's description of the origins of "perestroika", I am ready to swear that at least half of the facts presented are true, and the other half may well be true.

D. M. McIntyre

Part 5

XIV

I was sitting in the diplomatic lounge of Pulkovo airport, waiting for the plane from Paris, on which Bill Trokman was supposed to fly to St. Petersburg. The plane was delayed, and I, lounging in my chair, looked at the TV screen with curiosity. It was about ten o'clock in the evening. Gleb Venzorov's block of city news was broadcast on the local channel.

The majestically beautiful interior of the Cathedral of the Transfiguration appeared on the screen, where, on the occasion of some Orthodox holiday, the service was personally conducted by the local Metropolitan John in festive attire. The gilded icon frames, the glow of the candles, the lavishly decorated altar, and the Metropolitan's passionate (but not voiced) sermon—all this looked impressive. The Metropolitan addressed the flock, which was not much. Mostly, old women in headscarves, sad and miserable, like the whole thousand-year history of this country. But ahead of the old women, the Metropolitan's sermons were heeded by the true beacons of resurgent Orthodoxy.

Among them stood out the former KGB general Sevryugin, who arrived from Moscow, dressed in the full uniform of a Chekist general, and earnestly making the sign of the cross. It turned out he was ridiculously fake. He resembled a Polynesian who had been worked on by Christian missionaries for several years, teaching Christian rituals, the meaning of which had never reached him. But the situation obliged, for General Sevryugin was the head of a very cunning organization called the "Russian National Council", whose main task, to everyone's pleasure, was determined to be the fight against world Zionism. Behind such a wonderful screen, it was possible to do any kind of business, not pay taxes and provide a roof to whomever pleases, since the fight against world Zionism,

requiring, of course, gigantic costs, must proceed in an atmosphere of complete secrecy and lack of accountability.

I knew Sevryugin from the old days, when he headed the department of the so-called "new economic structures" in the KGB, which had one task - to shove some of the CPSU money among the right people and put it into circulation through a system of fictitious exchanges created again by the KGB. However, the general showed himself in this field as a complete mediocrity. He had the mentality of an ordinary "scoop". He rushed to privatize some apartments and dachas, and billions of dollars floated between his hands, which could buy an entire city. He was removed from money matters and they wanted to kick him out with the confiscation of his dacha (the ultimate punishment for incompetence), but then a new field turned up for him.

Even in pre-putchev times, the "Russian People's Front" began to form on the basis of a pure, bright and dynamic idea. It was on this idea that the famous Russian miracle of the early 20th century took place, when in ten short years Russia acquired such a dynamic of national development that the First World War had to be urgently started in order to at least slow it down. Nothing and never in world history has been subjected to such defamation and discredit as these 10 years of Russian history. Therefore, more than anything in the world, since 1917, the authorities were afraid of the revival of this idea and, we must give them their due, learned how to skillfully manipulate it. Suffice it to recall how the Memory Society began and what it was quickly turned into. I read the report of a German intelligence officer on this subject and laughed heartily. If the report had not been secret, it certainly could have become a bestseller. However, maybe someday it will.

So, General Sevryugin was thrown into the Russian national idea, and he immediately led it to fight world Zionism. Moreover, he tried so hard that from the very word "Russian idea" many began to shudder. This, in fact, was required of him. But even then there was a scandal. The general was accused of spending "cathedral" dollars not on the fight against world Zionism, but on himself. He was either expelled from the leadership of the "Sobor" or recalled, and now, looking at how he devoutly joins religion, I thought: are they going to appoint him somewhere a metropolitan, or even worse - to declare an archangel under Maria Devi Khristos . What thoughts may arise in the depths of the monster, no intelligence can predict. The monster's thoughts are given out by tentacles.

Next to Sevryugin (to his left), Vasily Dmitriev was devoutly baptized in his chic black uniform with admiral's epaulettes. He, apparently, concurrently oversaw the "Russian Cathedral". He was baptized much more professionally than Sevryugin, although there was no piety in his eyes.

To the right of Sevryugin stood General Orlov, supported arm by arm by some youth in paramilitary uniform. He looked very bad and, it seems, there was something sincere in his prayer.

Berkesov stood modestly at some distance from this company. No, he was not baptized. He held a candle in his hand with a kind of sad and concentrated look. There was some kind of sadness in his eyes, although it was today that Colonel Berkesov had every reason to thank the Almighty. In the morning, a message came about his promotion to the generals. General Berkesov. I remembered some events from ten years ago, and I also felt sad. Still, human life is built on some idiocy. Indeed, one can say that I was a witness when Berkesov was predicted his future as a general, which seemed so far away. And now he's a general.

The fabulous beauty of the Transfiguration Church was replaced in Venzorov's transfer by a miserable view of some city outskirts. A dozen policemen in uniform and plainclothes were dragged out of

some overgrown pond corpse.

Venzorov's voice behind the scenes explained: "And this, apparently, is an ordinary mafia showdown. A corpse of a man with his hands tied and with signs of torture was found in Lake Shuvalovo. He looks about 35-40 years old. An investigation has begun."

A close-up camera showed the face of the victim. I sighed. Viktor Ivanovich Belov did not need to rush out of the pre-trial detention center on Shpalernaya at all. An interesting country is Russia: here they either do not follow orders at all, but if they do, then very quickly.

Then some caught racketeers and apartment thieves flashed by, fires, garbage dumps and hungry old women. For a moment, the bewildered face of some colonel appeared against the background of the banner of the USSR, calling for the overthrow of the existing regime. Then Venzorov, with a half-smile, announced tomorrow's weather, and like a cavalry horde of Mamluks, an advertisement for our (American) cigarettes burst onto the screen on cowboy horses and cars of all brands. In America, she was banned a long time ago, and she famously emigrated to the territory of the former Union.

I turned away from the screen and looked at the scoreboard. The announcement was still green there that the flight from Paris was delayed by 40 minutes for technical reasons. I was about to head to the bar for a beer when I heard my name. Looking around, I could not believe my eyes: Patricia O'Neill - Gorgeous Pat - in a cap of her golden hair and with a mocking look in her green eyes, was walking straight into my arms.

"God," I said in surprise. Is that you, Pat? Or your daughter?

"You could ask about your granddaughter too, Mike," she laughed. You have always been a master at compliments. But what a small world! I didn't expect to meet you here.

"Interesting," I said. - It's not a problem to meet me here. I work in this country. And how did you get here? However," I continued, "I can bet that you flew to see some premiere at the Mariinsky Theatre. Guessed?

"You're smart, Mike," Pat kissed me on the cheek. - Certainly. I am currently working for a foundation that is trying to save the Russian school of classical ballet. I have always told you that Russian ballet is the best thing that Russia has created throughout its existence.

Pat was obsessed with Russian ballet. About seven or eight years ago, she appeared in Moscow and worked on some kind of monumental monograph about the Bolshoi Theater. At the time, she was often at the embassy, using the cultural attache as a battering ram to gain access to some theatrical archives, which were guarded with almost the same strictness as the KGB archives. Despite the fact that I knew nothing about ballet, and perhaps precisely because of this, we started flirting with her, which grew into a kind of romance, of which I and, I hope, she kept a very pleasant memory. However, Pat, carried away by the magical mysticism of Russian ballet, understood very little what the birthplace of this ballet had become in those years. She had the imprudence to bring with her some prospectuses dedicated to the work of Russian ballerinas and dancers who fled to the West during the tours of their troupes abroad. It never occurred to her that ballet stars could not, at their own discretion, choose the theater and country where they would like to demonstrate their highest art. For her beliefs, she had to spend almost a whole week in Lefortovo, and then be expelled from the USSR.

I, as an official representative of the embassy, accompanied Pat to the plane, where the Chekists took her with such precautions, as if she were a terrorist of the highest class. This happened just at the time when the Tolkachev group disembowelled without

the rest were all the secrets of the Soviet Air Force, and the Gritsenko group was finishing off the last secrets of the vaunted Soviet rocket science, which allowed us to attach explosive devices to all their satellites in order to smash them to shreds if necessary with one radio signal. And at that time, eight (!) muzzy KGB officers took Pat out of the car and handed her over to me at the gangway. Fortunately, this did not affect her love for Russian ballet, but our romance ended.

"Are you still working for Uncle Sam?" Pat asked.

I threw up my hands.

"Not everyone is given the privilege of doing what they love, like you, Pat.

Are you all at the embassy? she asked. - And what position do you hold now?

"Like then," I replied. - Assistant cultural attache.

There was a look of sadness in her eyes, the usual one when talking to a failed official.

"Yes, I'm a loser, Pat," I confessed. - It is not so easy to make a career in the State Department. To do this, you need to have qualities that I did not have. But I'm about to retire and take a job as a literary agent for my old dad, who writes war memoirs.

- Where is it? Pat asked.

— In Wisconsin. Not far from Green Bay," I explained.

"Better move to Boston," she suggested.

— Why is that? I didn't understand.

She smiled.

"Because I live there, Mike.

While I was about to answer something, a lady ran up to us, apparently also a lover of Russian ballet, shouting:

Patricia, where have you gone? We are already checking in for our flight.

"Chao." Pat kissed me on the cheek again. This time I managed to do the same thing, that is, kiss her on the cheek as well.

"When you arrive in the States, be sure to call," she waved her hand at me, dragging her friend into the tunnel leading to the landing. I followed them with my eyes.

The fact that I was not married is understandable. As a good American, I didn't want to spoil the statistics on the number of widows in the United States - the lowest in the world. As for why Pat had not married over the years, I, apparently, had to find out when I returned home.

I remembered that I was going to drink a beer at the bar, and I was already heading there, when finally, in three languages, the arrival of a flight from Paris was announced ...

From a distance I saw the small stocky figure of Bill Trockman, who came out of the customs control room, casually carrying a leather folder with a zipper in his hand. He looked as if he had flown from Washington for the weekend to Silver Springs. And no one around, even half a battalion of Berkesov's guys, who portrayed passengers and porters, did not understand at what historical moment they were present. On

the territory of the former Soviet Union, without observing any incognito, one of the deputy directors of the CIA arrived, and in fact the head of the CIA, since directors come and go, and the Agency has always been and will be led by people like Bill. The director of the CIA, on the other hand, is in fact something of a liaison officer between the CIA, the President, and Congress, as well as a spanking boy for the media.

"Damned good to see you, Mike," I replied. - In this country, only two hours ago they learned what ecology is. I think by the next morning it will be easier to breathe.

We left the building where the Consul General's car was waiting for us. A Marine in full uniform opened the back door. Behind them rumbled engines and twinkled sidelights three Berkesov's "Volga". We were photographed with hidden cameras from all sides and filmed, so I hoped that Berkesov would give me a couple of photos with his dedication inscription as a keepsake.

I think that if Trokman wanted to, he would have been given an escort of motorcyclists. But he specifically asked that his visit to St. Petersburg be furnished as modestly as possible. Nevertheless, in front of you and behind you, like the Janissaries of the padishah's personal convoy, black Volgas rushed, and in front of everyone, flashing with lights and howling with a siren, a police car rushed, stopping and pressing all traffic to the side of the road. Even our car could hear the roar of the loudspeaker: "All vehicles stop!"

How is the new administration? I asked Bill.

"You know, Mike," Trokman sighed. — We must thank the heavens that this torpedo bomber left the White House. If a person from the age of seventeen took off from the deck of an aircraft carrier with a torpedo under the seat, then, believe me, nothing in the world can change the course of his thoughts. And they are simple: detect, intercept, destroy. I worked with him when he was director of the CIA and when he became President. And I know him very well. When it was necessary to crush the Soviet bloc, he was in his place. Now, when the USSR collapsed, he would have broken such firewood that it's scary to think. In all the former Soviet republics, our governors would already be sitting, and the occupying dollar would circulate around the territory. And our soldiers would die somewhere in Orenburg or Chelyabinsk. And we would have a thousand-year war that would never end or end with our defeat. It would be super Vietnam... Our scenario is to keep the government in the shadows. As Louis XIV used to say, "the royal business is done, not the royal one - let the bankers do it." So now, Mike, we have chosen the best president of the moment. Not only did he not participate, thank God, in the Second World War, but in general he avoided serving in the army in every possible way. Plays the saxophone and patronizes homosexuals. This is just what is needed today. Do you understand me, Mike?

"I understand," I replied. "An era has ended. I also flew from an aircraft carrier and also understand that my time is over.

"Would you like to stay here for another tour?" Bill asked. "Chief suggests you stay here for another five years. We will agree with the State Department, and you will be made the first secretary of the embassy ...

I laughed.

"It's better to make me directly an ambassador from among the assistant attachés. No, Bill. Now a new person is needed here who would solve fundamentally new tasks. I dealt with a superpower, and now we need a specialist in developing countries. I have already done everything that is possible for a scout to do in a foreign country. We gutted them to the very core. All types of weapons, electronic systems, space weapon systems, codes, frequencies. To you

everything is known. I won't bore you, Bill, with everything we've shaken out of this country in the last 10 years. If they are still trying to cheat, say, with their bacteriological weapons or bluffing with psychotropic weapons, then let them laugh. They will be interested to know that we are ready to transfer all our bacteriological weapons laboratories to their territory so as not to expose ourselves to the danger of an accidental leakage of anthrax or bubonic plague, which happens almost every year. Moreover, the funny thing is that if we really didn't know about something or missed something, then they themselves offer us to buy it together with the brains of those who invented these little things. How do you like those Russian guys that I sent to Langley as a gift for the Independence Day?

"Yes," said Bill dreamily. "Some of our Nobel laureates were shocked. We are also good: the Russians have broken through into fundamentally new areas of science, where we have not even begun preliminary developments. We didn't even know about these directions.

"That's why they couldn't track them," I agreed. Because they had no idea about it.

"Amazing," Trokman continued. "These scientists will raise our technological level by three orders of magnitude, if not more, in the next five years. They will hand over the whole world into our hands on an entirely new basis. We don't have to swing Teddy Roosevelt's big stick to do it. But not only that is amazing, but the fact that they were powerless to do anything in their homeland and now agree to work for us for \$200 a week. Do you understand anything, Mike?

"Werner Braun's team worked for us for \$200 a month," I disagreed. "That always happens after empires fall.

I, of course, distorted. The rocket men of the Third Reich were the developers of new weapons systems, while the Russian scientists in question were doing something completely different. Russian rocket men in the flow of Jewish emigration were transported to the States 15 years ago. But I didn't want to start a lecture on the topic that Russian geniuses have always been at the mercy of criminal-minded ignorant people who are willing to spend money only on their own comfort and on killing any creative thought in the country, without understanding why their country periodically perishes.

I somehow came across a book by a modern Russian writer. I don't remember exactly what it was called. But she told me more than all the Dostoevskys and Tolstoys with whom we were stuffed at the Yale University Department of Slavic Studies. It was about a group of scientists who were trying to develop a new variety of potatoes better suited to the harsh climatic conditions of their region. In other words, they were trying to solve the most acute of all Soviet problems - food. I am not well versed in these issues, and no matter how much I live in Russia, it is impossible for a foreigner to realize the full depth of the local insanity. In short, it was about the following: it turns out that there were two ways of producing potatoes - communist and bourgeois. The communist gave some kind of rubbish that rotted in the summer and died in the winter. Bourgeois - gave good potatoes, but it was strictly forbidden to use them. And so these scientists decided to combine these two methods and grow a more or less decent fruit so that no one would know about it.

In doing so, they had to create something resembling a secret organization, as if they were at least preparing a coup d'état. But the state security did not doze off. Having received information from secret informants about the preparation of a new variety of potatoes, the KGB actively intervened in the events. As a result, several scientists were arrested, several died, the most dashing fled and hid for many years in the forest and on remote farms. At the same time, several KGB officers also died. But the most important thing was

made. All documentation on the new potato variety was seized and destroyed. The experimental plot of scientists was liquidated with the fury with which opium plantations are usually liquidated. The potatoes were destroyed. A group of talented scientists turned into criminals and outlawed. The operation was led by three KGB generals. Find me another analogue in the world history of all times and peoples, and I will give you beer for free for the rest of my life.

And somehow General Klimov showed me an archival document. Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, a group of engineers developed an anti-tank system, which had no analogue in the world. Woe would be to the tanks of Guderian and Manstein if they ran into this system in 1941. But nothing of the sort, of course, happened. State security acted even more actively than in the case of potatoes. All engineers were arrested and shot without trial. Documentation destroyed. The polygon sample was sent for remelting. Scraps of documentation were caught by our intelligence, and only now we were able to evaluate these scraps. The Russians were on the verge of creating an ATGM on the eve of the war! But these are only two drops in the Atlantic Ocean of such events. What could I explain to Bill, who did not know a word of Russian and came to this country for the first time? He did not understand that Russian geniuses and talents were ready to work not only for \$ 200 a week, but generally for free, so long as no one interfered with their work and they would not have to pay for the results of their work for the good of their country with their lives and their lives. families. I'm not talking about destroyed results. Therefore, I turned the conversation to the analogy with the Third Reich.

Bill nodded his head.

Yes, nothing like this happened after the collapse of the Third Reich. You don't know everything yet, Mike. They fell apart with a much bigger crash than the Third Reich. There, at least they hid in the mines and drowned some archives in the alpine lakes. And they give us everything: agents, turnouts, networks, codes. Either directly, or through the Mossad and NATO intelligence. We even artificially began to slow down this process. Why do we need to know everything about their agents? She never bothered us much." He laughed. "If it goes on like this, we risk losing our jobs."

"Anyway, we'll have to retrain," I agreed. - If now we have begun to carry out our own main task: to deploy Russia with a front from west to south, making it again the main buffer in the upcoming North-South confrontation, then we need to redirect the work of all intelligence services, including the National Security Agency. Let the Russians now bear the brunt of the Islamic extremism they have fomented in the hope of inciting us.

"Exactly," Bill said. "But to do this, we must preserve our military-industrial complex and even strengthen it. This is exactly why I came here. There will be an important meeting with Moscow on this topic. You know that Bush has already seen fields full of alfalfa at the site of all their military factories. This was the logic of the winner, who wants to bring the defeat of the enemy to the end. That is, on a more global scale, repeat the mistake with the Ruhr area. We see everything differently. We will make their military-industrial complex profitable, and we will still need it! Trust me. Only now it will work under our control. For this it is necessary to create new concepts and doctrines, which I intend to discuss in Moscow. Let Mr. Torrelli handle the rest. He assures that he has already twice bought everything that was once called the Soviet Union. He's exaggerating, of course, but the president has asked me to meet Torrelli here, to include you as well, if Señor Torrelli needs any advice. So let's stay here for a couple more days. Then I will fly to Moscow, and you to Paris. See you at the end of the month in Washington.

In the meantime, we rushed straight, like a spear, through the highway of Moskovsky Prospekt and rushed

further. Our way lay on Stone Island, in one of the state residences set aside especially for the forthcoming visit of Mr. Torrelli, where Bill and I were also given a couple of rooms.

Trokman looked out the window with curiosity. It was his first time in Russia and in St. Petersburg and he wanted to find at least a couple of hours to see the city, about which he read so much heard.

Are they preparing for elections? he suddenly asked me.

— For the elections? I didn't understand. - I'm afraid that this year nothing will work out, but there is a lot of talk about it.

"But, in any case, I see that they are already thoroughly preparing for them," Trokman did not let up.

"I don't understand anything," I replied. What are you talking about, Bill?

"I see," he said, pointing out the car window, "that here on almost every post and on every wall there is a portrait of some lady in white clothes. I assumed that she was running somewhere and, judging by the number of posters, she apparently represents some kind of influential party?"

I laughed.

- That's what you're talking about. No, she's not running anywhere. I would say that this is the apotheosis of Soviet feminism. Now they are no longer satisfied with the weavers who serve single-handedly entire factories, or women miners in the mines, and even astronauts. They decided to create a female god, a living god in whom Christ himself was embodied. Like our idiot Koresh. But at least he was a man.

- Christ woman? Bill didn't believe it.

Indeed, you never cease to be surprised when you learn what is happening in this country.

- And who is behind it? - he asked.

"Well, who's behind her?" I laughed again. "You know this country well enough, Bill, to understand a simple thing. At current prices, when even Yeltsin's decrees are distributed in pitiful photocopies, and it is absolutely impossible to find his portraits, what organization can print portraits of this woman in millions of copies and literally cover millions of cities with these portraits in just one night, penetrating into metro tunnels and police stations, and anywhere. I don't think you need to name this organization, Mr. Throckman?"

"Crazy," Bill said. — Do you know her?

- Whom? I asked. - Organization?

Bill sighed.

- No. With the organization, of course, everything is clear. I mean this woman.

"Personally, no," I replied. "But I saw her file. I confess to you, Bill, that I personally knew, so to speak, God the Father. He was one of Andropov's deputies and got into our affairs so deeply that he had to be shot corny in one of the safe houses. So, unlike many theologian-philosophers, I never have

there were doubts about where the holy spirit came from.

Bill laughed this time too.

"But for God's sake, Mike, why would they do such costly nonsense at a time like this?"

"Well, first of all," I replied, "they generally, by and large, have nothing to do now. Their budget is unlimited, and no one controls their costs. Therefore, they allow themselves any experiments. This is no longer an organization, Bill, this is a monster, and all individual representatives, regardless of title, are just tentacles. Not even the tentacles themselves, but individual suckers. You might ask, where is the brain? I myself puzzled over this question and came to the conclusion that it does not exist at all. There is only the instinct of self-preservation developed to an unprecedented size. The monster was never interested in national security. By and large, we can say that the monster never really knew in which state he lives. Tell him to be honest, the KGB estate destroyed the USSR, since this state formation ceased to suit him. He felt uncomfortable, and that was enough to gobble up his native party and destroy the country. He hoped that it would be more pleasant for him to live on the ruins of the empire. But the trouble is that although the monster is now very fond of the dollar, he can maintain his vitality only by sucking all the blood from his own people. In fact, he never did anything else. All they needed was for no one to interfere with indulging in their favorite pastime, especially from outside. And when they began to cut off their tentacles, they frantically began to look for alternative courses of action. Not only understand, but it is impossible to imagine the scale of their crimes. Now there are disputes, crazy in their academicism, how many people this monster destroyed in his own country: 40 million, 60 million or 100 million. This country is a terrarium where cobras and white mice live together, intended for their food. Cobras doze, but mice live. They do something there, breed, lick babies and the like. Cobra wakes up, kills and eats a couple of them, and the rest are glad that they didn't eat them today. And, of course, the monster is most of all interested in fooling the people, because such people are easier to destroy and at the same time enrich themselves at the expense of it. When the Marxist-Leninist incantations ceased to work, they frantically began to look for an ideological alternative. Either they are trying to raise the whole people to fight against world Zionism, or they are inventing new gods, or they are starting to rattle the drums of the Second World War again, as if this war ended only yesterday. Will it suddenly work? And with this Devi Christos, the same thing. The whole idea is rooted in their psychological warfare service. These are all fairy tales that they developed some ways to fight against us there. They only work against their own people. At the same time, they also fooled their own leadership that they, they say, came up with some kind of psychotropic means of warfare. So at one time they fooled even Stalin himself with various institutions of immortality, and when the time came, they themselves sent their beloved leader to the next world. Now, if you peel all the husks from Miss Christ's sermons, it turns out that she prophesies exclusively mass street riots and fools everyone about the mass character of her sect, which, according to my data, is good if one hundred people. Most of them are former instructors of the ideological departments of the liquidated regional committees and city committees of the CPSU. But when the riots begin, for the inevitability of which the population is gradually preparing, then no one will prevent the monster from putting white hoodies on his special forces units and arrange another bloodletting, and at the same time cover up the freedom of the press.

"All right," Bill said, "now that we've taken their poisonous teeth out of them, let them play as they please." Haven't they wised up in recent years?

"You would be surprised," I answered, "that not only have you not grown wiser, but have become even more stupid. Now they are trying to transform into something like a secret monastic order on an alloy

Marxism and Orthodoxy. No wonder they kept the church as one of their sub-departments for almost a century, recruiting the entire elite as informers, starting with the patriarch. However, this applied not only to Orthodoxy, but also to all other confessions. Now they have come up with a new thing that communism was the Soviet embodiment of the Orthodox dream. I have already said that the monster has no brain, but only instincts. This is generally some kind of cosmic being, which cannot be approached with earthly standards. So do not be surprised if one morning they announce that there is no longer a president in the country, but there is a Grand Prior ruling on behalf of Maria Devi Khristos or whatever else they come up with. Believe it or not, even the local head of the KGB has the ability to turn off the entire telephone network of the city, electricity, gas, water, flood the subway, paralyze transport, blow up bridges and much more at the touch of a button. Billions were spent on all this.

"It's all very interesting," Trokman sighed. "So you're saying this lady is predicting street riots?"

"And even the end of the world," I added, "which she appointed for November 24th. And I won't be at all surprised if, under this prophecy, the monster does not try to destroy so many people, as much as possible. Although I am sure that absolutely nothing will happen on November 24, but these dates will be constantly postponed in anticipation of the right moment.

"Whatever happens," Bill said, as if summing up what he had heard, "in the end, everything will benefit us. If they want to drive Russia further into the Middle Ages, let them frolic. In the end, they will turn their country into a reservation, and tourists will pay huge money just for the opportunity to look at them from some special gallery that will be built in the future. Do you feel sorry for them, Mike? To me, not at all. They got what they deserved.

"I feel sorry for them," I admitted. "I think they deserve more. Still white people. And potentially this country could even give us a hundred points ahead. And what happens? A country that owns almost half of the world's oil reserves stands with empty gas stations. The country that has the best arable land in the world imports grain from us, from Canada, and from several other places. A country that mines half of the world's gold a year is sinking into a bottomless quagmire of inflation. It's all some kind of mysticism, Bill. Yes, on Yakut diamonds alone, they could live better than the subjects of the Emir of Kuwait. And you can't even imagine the poverty these people live in. Enter the house of even a local millionaire who made a fortune reselling, say, German technical spirit or selling us strategic raw materials, and you will be shocked by the squalor of the situation. You will be proudly shown a South Korean stamped video recorder or 2nd generation computer, and will wait with bated breath to see what a powerful impression it makes on you. You should have seen how their eyes light up at the sight of dollars. Like the panthers in the zoo when they are brought meat. You can already buy everything here for dollars: from strategic missiles to the Minister of Security. It just gets ridiculous. Some nimble old men in Germany, who once served in those parts of the Wehrmacht that kept this city in blockade for three years and starved more than two million people, collected several thousand Deutsche Marks and offered to erect a monument to themselves in the very place as far as their 175th division reached. With the inscription "To the valiant soldiers of the Wehrmacht who fell in the fight against Bolshevism, from grateful Leningraders." And what do you think? A competition for the best design of the monument was immediately announced. The surviving blockade veterans raised a scandal, but I am sure that one way or another, some monument to the Wehrmacht will still be installed, since the currency has already been received. Can you imagine the monument to Admiral Yamamoto in Pearl Harbor from the grateful sailors of the US Pacific Fleet? Or a monument to Goering in London from grateful citizens in memory of the battle for England?

Bill laughed.

"I know you well, Mike. Are you joking?"

Bill pointed his thumb behind his back towards the rear window of the car, making a grimace, which I translated as "stop teasing them." In the Volga following, even judging by the distance at which it kept, our conversation with Trokman was feverishly recorded. Out of sadistic motives, we chatted (and it was chatter and nothing more) in naval slang: fortunately, both of us served in the navy in our youth and knew this language perfectly. Let the Berkes translators suffer. It seems to me that the film is being spun to be sent to Moscow. There is hardly a specialist in this city who knows the naval slang of the US West Coast. If there was one, then he was either imprisoned as a spy, or he emigrated long ago.

XV

Meanwhile, our cavalcade drove through a massive gate in the middle of a blank fence surrounding a very beautiful two-story mansion, built at the end of the last century by order of one of the Grand Dukes. In those years, Kamenny Island was a resort area of the capital of the empire, and everyone built summer cottages there, from kings and members of the royal family to wealthy industrialists and merchants. In principle, the island remained a kind of resort area - the city, as it were, bypassed it - but the owners here, of course, were new.

The mansion, like everything in the city, belonged to the CPSU. But when the party barons became interested in more modern Iowa Farmer cottages (this happened after Khrushchev's visit to the USA), the mansion was given to the KGB. It was used by all post-war KGB chairmen when they honored the city with their visit. And since two of them were pederasts, and the rest were perverts (which is not surprising, since almost all of them came from the Central Committee of the Komsomol), I expected to see a lot of interesting things here, but I was mistaken. The first thing I saw in the yard were two huge vans unloading food and wine destined for Señor Torrelli, who had arrived from Chicago along with his favorite chefs: a Chinese and an Italian. The vans were unloaded by Berkes officers dressed in overalls, and other officers in uniform (and with machine guns!) Watched the work, apparently fearing that something would be stolen and there would be a scandal. Or maybe they feared an attack. For example, a ten-gallon container of drinking water could well be sold in the city for \$20.

Who owned this mansion now, it was not exactly known. There were rumors that the CPSU, going underground, legally transferred the mansion to the KGB, but the latter, frightened by the scandal unfolded in the press about the Kamennostrovsky mansions, gave it away from harm to the city, continuing, however, to use it. Apparently, in order to avoid interdepartmental squabbles in the future, Mayor Topchak was forced to privatize the mansion at book value, which now amounted to the cost of about ten blocks of cigarettes. There were even rumors that Topchak, in order to stop all the gossip about this grand ducal mansion, ordered it to be dismantled and taken to his summer cottage, where it was reassembled. Where this site is located, no one (including myself), of course, did not know. Maybe in California or Australia. I never tried to verify such rumors, since we were strictly forbidden to interfere in the private lives of the citizens of the new Russia in order to accustom them to a true understanding of democracy. So I do not exclude at all that these were just rumors spread by political opponents of Topchak, who was already clearly aiming for the presidency of the country.

However, in the spacious hall of the mansion, it was Topchak who met Bill and me with a wide hospitable smile.

This somewhat surprised me, since I was sure that Berkesov would meet us, as was required by the unwritten protocol of such contacts. But, apparently, Berkesov had already sat down to listen to a free translation from the tape of our conversation with Bill in the car in order to report this to analysts in Moscow in time. They will listen to the tape, shake their heads and send it to lie in a secret record library until the end of the current geological period.

"Come in, come in, dear friends," the mayor sang in quite tolerable English. — Settle down. Mike, why didn't you introduce your friend to me?

"I beg your pardon," I said. - Meet Alexander Topchak - the mayor of this city. William Throckman is a merchant and Mr. Torrelli's real estate consultant.

I don't know if a nuclear cruiser can be considered real estate, but Topchak was very happy.

"Don't forget, Mike, to remind Mr. Torrelli what I asked.

Meanwhile, Bill looked around in surprise. I have to admit that so am I.

In the middle of a vast hall, on the ceiling of which nymphs in flower wreaths and satyrs with voluptuous smiles (old-mode painting) circled in a round dance, there was an awesome bust of Felix Dzerzhinsky, made of black marble. On a pedestal with a bas-relief image of a shield and a sword, it was inscribed in gold letters: "In this house in 1917-1918, the founder of the Cheka, a faithful ally of V.I. Lenin and I.V. Stalin Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky lived and worked" and just below: " From the Leningrad Directorate of the MGB, December 20, 1948.

To the left, on the wall, was a huge panel depicting Lenin and Dzerzhinsky reading a tape crawling from a telegraph machine. On the right was Dzerzhinsky, surrounded by ruddy and happily smiling homeless children, who, apparently, had just been read an order that, as an exception, they would not be shot.

And above the head of the marble founder of the secret police, completing, as it were, the historical cycle, hung in a gilded frame the image of the Holy and Equal-to-the-Apostles Grand Duke Alexander Nevsky, who, concurrently, was probably considered the patron saint of the secret police. It hung high enough, and I couldn't make sure that there was an inscription on the salary: "From the Leningrad Directorate of the KGB" with the corresponding date.

"Did you understand," Topchak asked, escorting us up the marble stairs lined with stucco figures from Roman and Greek mythology, "that Dzerzhinsky himself lived here?"

- With his well-known asceticism. I remarked, "That is quite understandable. Otherwise, he would have occupied the Winter Palace.

"Oh," Topchak continued. "You don't know yet. Dzerzhinsky not only occupied this mansion. He received a deed of gift from Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich on the eve of his execution. And the mansion was considered the property of Iron Felix. Only in 1930, Sergei Mironovich Kirov managed to return the mansion to state ownership and set up a dispensary for regional committee workers here ...

Who does it belong to now? I asked.

— City. the mayor replied quickly. "This is a residence for honored guests.

"I'm only afraid," I said, "that Mr. Torrelli won't like it here. I heard that he does not like all this medieval splendor at all, especially in combination with the monumental monuments of socialist realism.

- Do you think Dzerzhinsky should be removed? the mayor got scared. But it's so exotic. It seemed to me that all this should amuse Monsieur Torrelli. Besides, it's so symbolic. The idols of a bygone era against the background ...

- No no. I reassured him. "I just expressed my opinion and nothing more. It may very well be just the opposite. The whims of rich people are unpredictable, as are the ways of the Lord.

We went up to the second floor, where two bronze getters held vases with fresh roses over their heads. A huge gilded pier glass reflected a picture in a precious baguette, in which cavalymen in red capes and shakos, raising their naked sabers, were galloping in front of a special monarch, who was sitting on a white horse. Fine stuccoed and carved doors with massive bronze handles led off to either side of the foyer. Four griffins, spreading their wings, held in their beaks and paws a gilded chain, from which hung a massive chandelier with about three dozen light bulbs. And in the wall between the fabulous door and the Venetian window, draped with brocade curtains, there was a portrait of Lenin in a clerical frame, and below it - a piece of drawing paper, on which, by hand, but with a claim to calligraphy, it was written: "Schedule of duty for object No. K- 28".

"Well, this is absolutely bad taste," I said to Topchak. - Remove it, please.

- Yes Yes. said the mayor. - We'll take it for sure.

- In this room, - continued the mayor, Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich on the eve of his arrest ...

I began to worry if Topchak was going to hang around here until morning. I hoped that the Berkes guards would not let him in here at all, but apparently he was their own Human.

"My friend," I said to the mayor. Everything you say is extremely interesting. I might even ask you to take me on a tour of all the mansions on this island. But my buddy Bill flew across the ocean, and he needs a little rest to acclimatize. Therefore, unfortunately...

I did not have time to finish my phrase, which I wanted to build in the Japanese manner in the most polite form, when an already middle-aged man in some strange uniform grew up right out of the ground and said, turning to the mayor:

- Alexander Anatolyevich, your car has been delivered to the entrance, as you ordered.

And turning to us:

- Allow me, gentlemen, I will lead you to the room reserved for you.

The mayor, without saying a word, obediently began to go down, and we went through the left door, continuing to look around.

We entered a comfortably furnished living room, where the attendant, who had called us "gentlemen" in the foyer, began to call us "comrades".

— Settle down, comrades. he said cheerfully. Everything is at your disposal.

He made a sweeping gesture with his hand, pointing to the glassed-in windows of the Romanian walls, filled, as elsewhere in such places, with a simple assortment of American cigarettes and cheap liquors. Explaining that two adjacent rooms were provided for us to relax, the escort asked what else he could be useful to us?

I asked for coffee and a large glass of good French cognac. Then something happened that usually happens only in Scheherazade's fairy tales. Before I could close my mouth, a pretty girl in an apron came into the room, carrying coffee and cognac on a tray. Since Bill did not understand Russian, this scene did not make the slightest impression on him. And I did not begin to translate anything for him, just as I did not translate a word of the interesting things that the hospitable Topchak told me. He would somehow understand little or nothing at all. Indeed, why could Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich have a mansion, but Felix Edmundovich could not? I don't quite understand what the point is here. And not that one, I did not earn any other money, but had mansions according to their position. And why is it shameful for the head of the security service of a huge state to have his own mansion?

It is very dangerous to work in Russia for a long time. You will inevitably go crazy living among their inferiority complexes, mutual rejection and completely crazy contradictions. I have been here soon for 15 years and during this time I have been at home no more than 10 times and then raids. No, it's decided - I've had enough. From the next round I resolutely refuse. I'll report to Bill, consult Mr. Torrelli, and get on the first flight to Paris. Yes, I still have to meet Coyote. Or let him go to hell? Okay, I'll decide on the situation.

Blissful thoughts swept over me from the cognac, which, although not French, was excellent. Bill and I smoked in silence, he a cigar and I a cigarette, drinking coffee and sipping cognac at one of the most secret KGB hideouts in the city. At the same time, contrary to all instructions, not at all worried that they would add drugs to us or arrange some other filth, that we could disappear without a trace, die, die in Butyrki or Lefortovo, like, say, Count Beleren or Count Wallenberg. Times were no longer

those...

Trokman put out his cigarette and looked at me.

"Mike," he asked, "so what happened to the last batch of missiles and nuclear weapons that they wanted to send to Saddam for cash. I did not really understand anything from your telephone message. Either they went to Israel through Iran, or to Iran through Israel. What happened there?"

Bill took out a small case, like those used to store jewelry, from his jacket pocket, opened it and looked at the device, vaguely resembling a voltammeter.

"There are microphones poked in here," he grumbled, "like at the inauguration of President Truman. They'll have to sweat today."

He pressed a button on the instrument panel, followed the course of some curves on a flashing green screen, and again turned to me:

So I'm listening to you, Mike.

I was about to answer, when a man in a strange uniform, which went very well with his noble gray hair, again entered the living room without knocking.

His eyes darted across the room from wall to wall. Apparently, he expected to see here

a radio jammer mounted on a truck.

"Do your comrades need something else to eat?" he asked.

"My friend," I answered him, "you will oblige us very much if you come here next time at about 8 o'clock in the morning.

"Understood," he said, and obediently left the room, tightly closing the door behind him.

"It hits the ears really hard," Bill said guiltily. "I should have warned him.

"He must have figured it out himself," I suggested. "So you were asking about Saddam's missiles, Bill? This is a very funny story that perfectly illustrates what is happening in this country today. Now in Russia there are several powerful groups pursuing different goals, but united by one task - to earn as many dollars as possible. One of these groups is the former Soviet military-industrial complex, which is now literally fighting for its survival, and therefore extremely dangerous. Every day he more and more acquires the features of a feudal mafia clan, ready to do anything for profit. Conversion is still a funny anecdote and will remain so for the foreseeable future. The military-industrial complex is ready to strangle its own country, it is even ready to dismember after the USSR and Russia, if only it would be allowed to produce its deadly toys in the quantities to which it is accustomed. The government, in order to save itself, allowed the military-industrial complex to independently conclude a deal with anyone and on any conditions and deal with deliveries directly, bypassing Moscow. You know all this. You also know that powerful revanchist communist groups, which, if not completely, but understood what happened to the Soviet Union, are doing everything possible to reanimate its corpse. They kindled endless wars on the outskirts of the former empire, preventing the Caucasian and Central Asian republics from leaving for the sphere of influence of other countries, they are now starving and cold Ukraine, and the like, which you also know. In the foreign policy aspect, these people are trying to kindle a conflict anywhere, if only we would get involved in it, get stuck in it, ease the pressure on the ruins of the former Soviet Union and give them the opportunity to do whatever they want on these ruins. In other words, they want us not only not to hinder them from restoring the Union, but even to be forced to help in this and, of course, to pay for their efforts.

In the name of this, they are ready to supply any weapon in any quantity, since they have accumulated three times more of this good than all other countries combined, anyone who would risk unleashing some kind of regional conflict with a tendency to develop into a global one. I even find it difficult to say what is more here: the desire to earn currency or regain their former power with the mythical former power. When they saw that they were dying, they still managed, thank God, 13 years late, to ignite a war in the Persian Gulf. Then came the turn of the former Yugoslavia. You know Karadzic's statement that if our aircraft strikes Serbian positions, he will respond with a nuclear strike against all NATO countries. He was asked where he would get nuclear weapons? Without a moment's hesitation, Karadzic replied that he would buy it on the black market. Where this black market is located, no need to guess. Our friend Saddam Hussein repeats almost every day that he is ready to endure all the humiliations in which the United States put him until he gets his own nuclear weapons. And then we'll talk. Where is he waiting for? Even the idiot Aidid from Somalia hints that he is waiting for the arrival of tactical nuclear weapons in order to take revenge on the Americans for everything. After the collapse of the USSR, we managed to convince the KGB that if the empire's nuclear arsenal began to spread around the world, then it would not be us who would lose, but they. There is no need to prove this truth. We have carried out several successful joint operations, liquidating several attempts to send nuclear weapons abroad, in fact, at the stage of intention.

But the trouble is that now the KGB has split into several parts, because according to the old tradition, everyone informs on each other. But the work became very difficult. Almost nothing can be predicted or even planned. The general you are dealing with may belong to one faction, his deputy to another, and the executors to a third. In addition, most of the qualified security workers simply left the KGB after the collapse of the empire and now provide work for various political and military groups that are in the shadows. It would have been completely impossible to work if we had not deployed a huge information network on the territory of Russia, linking it directly to the Moscow residency, that is, to me.

But even this does not give any guarantees, since having information is one thing, and using it without having your own task forces is another. Here we constantly need the help of the KGB. And, finally, you have no idea, Bill, how many secret burrows almost the size of Detroit are located on the territory of the former USSR, which, say, in the Lubyanka, no one knows about today. Those who knew either disappeared, or were eliminated, or hid in these holes. Once upon a time, all these super-secrets were closed to a special apparatus in the Central Committee of the CPSU, which went underground along with the entire party in August 1991.

So, after conducting several trial operations and checking your reactions and capabilities, relying on their people in the depths of the military-industrial complex and the KGB, they decided to start a big game - to send a whole echelon of missiles and nuclear warheads abroad to them, loading them in one of the underground cities (where, by the way, prisoners who have become suicide bombers are still working) for three echelons following one after another. I received this information from my intelligence network, and confirmation from General Klimov. He also showed me the address of the recipient of the cargo - Saddam Hussein. Like it or not, it does not matter much, but only Saddam, Gaddafi and Israel, that is, we, can pay such a load in cash. I'm very glad, Bill, that you didn't even raise an eyebrow. So you understand my train of thought.

"Of course," Trokman said grimly. "Sometimes it's easier to just buy nuclear toys from them for cash than to risk them falling into the hands of children who haven't even learned how to use matches yet. We recently bought several excellent Soviet Sanborn missiles from Ukraine for only \$600,000 apiece. And in Kyiv they are sure that they sold them to Iran. Can you imagine what bastards? They are preparing their own future disaster. However, this is already a tradition. It's all right, Mike. What you are saying is, in principle, well known to me. In this case, I'm wondering where these trains have gone? Because, as you probably guess, they were not sent to any Iran, and they did not reach St. Petersburg.

"A moment of patience," I asked. - Having received a message that these echelons were actually tracked to Moscow itself, clearly understanding that they were going to the port of St. Petersburg, I pretended that I was no longer interested in this whole story and I completely trust the further conduct of the operation to my Russian colleagues. Moreover, I spread the word that I'm going on vacation. At this time, I receive your encryption requesting to locate and eliminate the Coyote ...

"By the way," Trokman interrupted me. — I want to express my deepest gratitude to you that you agreed to personally carry out this work. This is an extreme case, but it has already bothered us a lot.

"Nonsense," I replied. "Moreover, I did it with great pleasure. I haven't forgotten how he interrogated Clancy with masturbation spiders. Damn them! I would not only send him to the next world, if it were my will ...

"Don't get excited," Bill interrupted me again, "and keep going. You remember," I continued, "the cipher text about Coyote. There was a cipher within a cipher, informing me supposedly about

the appearance in Paris of a long-dead terrorist. After naming our object Coyote in his memory and actually inventing this whole incredible story to justify my arrival in St. Petersburg and hide the true goals of this visit, we were all, to put it mildly, quite surprised when almost simultaneously with me - miraculously resurrected Coyote. At first, I thought that these were some kind of KGB jokes, especially when they, following him, made it possible for him to hide literally in broad daylight. His visits to the consulate further convinced me of my suspicions, but in the end I realized that I was mistaken. For the KGB, his visit was as unexpected as it was for us. And that it matched your cipher, announcing the arrival of the Coyote, but meaning something completely different, was simply stunning. You promised to bring with you some materials giving a version of this event. I have my own version. It would be interesting to...

"I brought them," Bill lit his cigar again, "and we will return to this, of course. But for now, let's continue talking about echelons.

"Okay," I agreed. Let's get back to the trains. When they arrived in St. Petersburg and were detained, when it turned out that there was not even a hint of missiles and warheads for them, I was struck by the imitation of activity shown by the head of the local security department, Colonel Berkesov. He personally checked almost every container, demonstrating to me that there is nothing more dangerous than scrap metal. Completely incomprehensible was the arrival of the mayor of the city to these echelons, who threw a public scandal on Colonel Berkesov right at the station. Topchak is probably the smartest person in today's Russia, and suddenly they allowed themselves to light up like that. The guards of the echelons with metal were disarmed and taken into custody, and their chief, a former criminal who, by the way, had already been killed, was interrogated in my presence - again, personally Berkesov, trying to assure me that the real echelons had gone south. Therefore, apparently, for the sake of credibility, they decided to tell me the whole story of this unfortunate guy. Then, as you know, I met with our Israeli friends who were also stunned by the Coyote story. However, knowing their method of presenting information and disinformation, I realized that they knew nothing about these echelons and were somewhat confused. The reaction to the disappearance of trains and General Klimov was also suspicious. He seemed to know something, but did not dare to tell me. He did not dare, but did not want to mislead me.

I began to assume that these echelons somehow in a devilish way broke into the port and, on the personal initiative of the port director Marchenko and local mafia structures, were loaded onto ships and sent to the addressee. However, I had information from Frank Crump's men that no weapons trains were coming to the port. I received indirect confirmation of this when I expressed my assumptions to Berkesov. Before I had time to express this assumption, Marchenko was immediately arrested on charges of corruption. On this charge, as you know, in Russia now you can safely take into custody anyone: from a stall holder to a minister.

In the meantime, two container ships flying Liberian flags, which, according to my information, were intended for the removal of warheads and missiles, continued to stand in the port, occupying the berths. All this indicated that the echelons had disappeared somewhere and even the state security, at least in the person of Colonel Berkesov, did not know anything about this, since during interrogation Marchenko swore that he had never heard anything about it at all. I received the protocol of interrogation bypassing Berkesov, that is, I could consider that it was not intended specifically for me. In conditions when one part of the KGB is fighting with another, it is very difficult to foresee all the diabolical moves of the parties. Therefore, I ordered Nick Dale in Moscow to contact our mothballed agents in the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense, hoping that they had some information.

The options were as follows: Klimov and Berkesov are playing a double game, which is not at all out of the question. If this is so, given the huge money that the customer paid (whoever he is

was), they will find a way to throw missiles across the border, playing complete innocence with me. After all, Liberian container ships could be nothing more than a bait, and trains, having bypassed St. Petersburg, could be sent to the Baltic states, from where a free path was opened to them anywhere. At the same time, they skillfully fool me with the story of the living Coyote. Or Klimov and Berkesov themselves lost this game and are simply ashamed to tell me about it. Their colleagues, who today oppose them, turned out to be smarter and more cunning. This is always difficult to admit, especially to a foreigner. I even began to think whether these echelons had fallen off somewhere down a slope, which happens in Russia almost daily these days. Did they run into some kind of oncoming train because someone stole all the contact copper from the switch switch, which happens everywhere in Russia? I even went so far as to try to connect the appearance in the city of someone posing as the late Coyote with the loss of trains. In other words, I did not exclude the influence of a third force ...

- Third force? Trokman asked. "You call it a third force?"

"For brevity," I explained. - Although such a phenomenon, as you understand, can be called differently. And somewhere in the depths of my brain sat some kind of completely unconscious feeling that I had when I saw the security unit that accompanied the echelons with scrap metal. Their chief, during interrogation, admitted that his contingent had to escort echelons with missiles. Bill, to call this team a gang is to say nothing about them. In the car in which they rode from empty bottles of vodka, it was possible to build a full-size Empire States Building. The smell of vodka, vomit, tobacco smoke. Bras and women's panties are hung on light bulbs. Everyone is drunk. Weapons all around. Bullet marks on the walls. There are glasses and playing cards on the tables. All without exception, including the commander, with a criminal record. The thought flashed through my mind that with such an escort and with the cargo, and with the escorts, anything could happen. Even something that no one would think of. I pushed this thought away, hoping that such cargoes, if not under the control of the security service or the GRU, then at least under the control of shadow structures that broke away from these departments, which are sufficiently responsible at least as far as their earnings are concerned. And I turned out to be an idealistic idiot who believes that the wolf dressed up as a grandmother, and Little Red Riding Hood did not recognize him. The only excuse that can serve me is the fact that such things now occur only in Russia. However, they happen already so often that I could think of such a possibility more quickly.

"So what happened in the end?" Bill stopped chewing his cigar and stared at me.

"And what happened next," I continued with sadistic slowness. - The echelons, as Klimov reported, cunningly bypassed Moscow and headed towards St. Petersburg, skillfully changing lines along a well-thought-out route, so as not to stop at any stations at the entrance to the city, slip straight to the commercial port, reload containers onto ships and go empty to the marshalling yard. According to the schedule, they were supposed to do it in broad daylight, just at the moment when Berkesov climbed all the containers of the bait echelon, showing me scrap metal. So the role of our friends from the KGB in this matter is still very doubtful.

As I am not sad to admit it, but the plan was worked out so carefully and so professionally that the missiles could have been taken out of Russian territory, regardless of whose side Berkesov and his bosses were on and for whom they worked. And then something happened that neither they nor I could even think of, although, I repeat, we had to take into account such a possibility as occurring quite often.

When the echelons bypassed Lake Ilmen to approach St. Petersburg from the southwest, on one of the hauls, the guards shot each other. In a firefight that broke out for an unknown reason, the entire escort group of the lead echelon, including the commander, died.

groups.

Nobody, except the last one, knew the route of the trains. The commander of the escort group reported the next station only after arriving at the previous one, coordinating the route with the railway administration. The trains arrived at the Ugorosh station and stopped waiting for further orders. Of course, they didn't follow. The head of the train brigade arrived in the so-called "staff" car and found there only dead or dying from wounds. The firefight, apparently, was fierce: all the walls and bulkheads were riddled with bullets, the glass in many windows was broken. Around lay or stood half-empty and empty bottles. Blood flowed in streams through the broken glass. The operational group of the local police, who arrived in the car, began an investigation, trying to restore the details of the tragedy. But no one knew where to go next. Nobody knew even the final destination. The emergency was reported to Moscow through the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The echelons were driven to a standstill, waiting for special orders. The guards of the other two echelons, found in a state of terrible intoxication, were disarmed and arrested by the police. The train crew was also detained.

In Ugorosh, there were no personnel to guard the echelons. No one knew exactly the nature of the cargo. The waybills indicated that the containers were carrying household radio-electronic equipment. This was enough for the next night all the containers were opened and partially plundered. Various items of women's toiletry were found in different compartments. The women themselves were not found in the car. It is believed that the women were either killed and thrown off the train as they ran, or thrown out alive. A search is organized along the route of the echelons. The working version of the investigation is that the quarrel in the security car broke out precisely because of the women.

— Merciful God, said Trokman, pale with horror. When did you find out all this?

- Actually today. I replied. - Through my communication channels, I immediately informed the administration of President Yeltsin about this and informed General Klimov about this. Note that I told him about it, not he told me. In addition, I reported the incident to several journalists I knew in Moscow and St. Petersburg. I have little hope that anything can be prevented in this country by glasnost, but still I hope.

- And how did General Klimov react to your message? Trokman asked.

"Although, of course, he knew everything even without me, Klimov pretended to be stunned," I said. "He announced that he would immediately send a special task force there to investigate all the circumstances of the disaster. Let's hope that he sent it before my message and the group is already there. Apparently, it will be difficult for her, because journalists also went to Ugorosh. Of course, it doesn't cost anything to arrest them and send them back, but in any case, they will at least write about it. That's the way it is, Bill. What do you say to all this?"

Trockmann made no answer and began lighting his cigar again.

He released several smoke rings.

Basically, Mike. Trokman said. - this case gives us good trump cards. I will try to use them as much as possible in Moscow. Perhaps we will be able to achieve the resignation of the current Minister of Security and a number of his deputies. But this is a secondary issue. The main thing is that we will finally take control of all their stocks of nuclear weapons. It is possible that we will export them to Russia altogether ...

- Where? I asked.

"I'd rather have them lying in some underground warehouse in Nevada than driving around here on their unreliable railroads, accompanied by criminals," Bill replied.

"I think your proposal will please our congress the most," I laughed. - Having learned about the removal of nuclear weapons from Russia, the Capitol will simply go crazy with joy and close the CIA in joy. It seems to me that it would be more efficient to take these warehouses under our protection on the territory of Russia than to turn the United States into an international nuclear dump. Most recently, we succeeded in obtaining an order from President Yeltsin, giving greater rights to the local Gosatomnadzor to conduct a thorough audit of all enterprises, organizations and military units of the Ministry of Defense in order to take nuclear weapons under civilian control and conduct an audit of nuclear and radiation safety. However, like all other presidential decrees, no one in the army is going to carry out this order. The army here continues to be a state within a state. For her, a presidential decree is not a decree. Not a single representative of Gosatomnadzor was allowed anywhere. Not a single object, let alone any documentation. We probed the situation through our channels and, to our greatest surprise, discovered that the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Atomic Energy, headed by a retired admiral, were ready to allow inspectors from our nuclear complex to visit their facilities and were themselves hinting at the possibility that we would take under guard their neglected economy.

"I have read your reports," Trokman nodded his head. "But things are not so simple here. Strange things have also been happening with our nuclear reserves lately. I get the impression that some third force, about which nothing is known, even about its nature, is increasingly openly interfering in many of our affairs. And the case with Coyote is another confirmation of this.

"But why do you think, Bill," I wondered, "that the nature of this force is unknown? It seems to me that this is the only thing that mankind has known since its birth. All religions of the world...

"That's a primitive approach to the problem," Trokman interrupted me. — Exceptionally primitive. We tried to explain phenomena without bothering to understand their nature. And we fell into dangerous delusions, which we continue to do to this day. I brought you some papers. Review them.

Trokman took out several sheets of photocopies from a folder, fastened with a red plastic clip. I took the papers and ran through them with my eyes.

- Good God! — burst out from me. - Do you think it's him?

"I doubt it," Bill replied dully.

"I want to see him and talk to him," the schoolboy woke up in me.

- Do you think it's that easy? Bill shook his head doubtfully.

But he invited me! I continued to insist.

"I don't mind," Bill shrugged. "From a practical point of view, it makes no sense. You won't learn anything new, just like those who talked to him before you. But, like them, you run the risk of going with him...

- Where? I asked stupidly, even though I knew the answer.

"Where he came from," Trokman answered imperturbably, putting out his cigar.

Shaving in the morning, out of habit, I turned on the TV. The sleepy face of the President of Russia appeared on the screen. His lips moved. He said something, but the footage was not voiced. The voice-over announcer was enthusiastically talking about the beneficial effects of the new Constitution, which must be adopted as soon as possible. The president's lips continued to move. Then the camera was directed into the hall, where some lean gentleman was speaking passionately from the microphone, addressing the President and waving a bundle of some papers. It was evident that Yeltsin was listening to him without any pleasure. The movement of the presidential eyebrows, and four burly fellows, grabbing the broadcaster by the arms and legs, dragged him away from some kind of magnificent medieval Kremlin chamber. The unfortunate man desperately resisted, writhed and even managed to take off his shoe from one foot and throw it at the president. But all this did not help - he was thrown out the door, where people with microphones immediately rushed at him and, panting, he proceeded to a flying press conference. So the analogy with the times of Ivan the Terrible would be completely incorrect. Having paid tribute to the great Russian democracy, I turned off the TV with a sigh and went into the living room, where breakfast and a surprise were waiting for me.

Trokman and Klimov were sitting at the table, drinking coffee and talking about something.

— Mike! Klimov greeted me with a wave of his hand. - You can congratulate me!

I looked at him questioningly.

— The President signed an order to award me the rank of Colonel General. Thumbs up. Is it true?

"Something like general ranks fell on you," I quipped, "as on Napoleonic colonels after Austerlitz. This is probably for the echelon with nuclear weapons?"

"Thank you for the echelon, Mike," Klimov said sternly. - You helped me a lot. I have already told Mr. Trokman.

He apparently thought that Bill would make me a full general too.

"The president yelled at our minister," Klimov continued, "as in his obkom times. The Minister fell ill in a pre-infarction condition. There, along the way, some trifles from his private life were revealed, which I don't even want to talk about. In general, everyone expects him to be fired soon. It is necessary, finally, for our bodies to free themselves from the dictates of politicians and give the opportunity to show themselves to real professionals who - you, Mike, don't let me lie - have broken the road to democracy with their breasts, crushing totalitarianism.

Klimov's struggle for democracy began back in 1981, when his Office organized the murder of priest Popelyushko in Poland, and then handed over his killers to justice, destabilizing the situation in Poland to such an extent that no martial law could save the situation.

"We understand the situation, General," Bill said with some solemnity to Klimov. - I will say more: we have decided to recommend you for the post of the new Minister of Security.

Who is "we", Bill did not specify. At least he never discussed this issue with me. But, of course, if he did, then I would also recommend him

Klimov, despite his terrible past. If only because there was simply no one else left. Some of the professionals went into new power and commercial structures, some moved into the criminal world and joined the international terrorist and mafia groups with a powerful stream, and some simply fell into prostration, childishly rejoicing that they did not fall into the dock.

Apparently, Trokman's statement was not some big surprise for Klimov, because he said:

— I think it will be the right decision. It is necessary, finally, to establish proper order in the country ...

He hesitated and added:

— ... and in the world.

What they could never be denied was global thinking. If they had any bright dream, then it always hovered over the world, constantly trying on to throw on the planet the same collar with which they strangled their own country.

"And your deputy," I said to him in Russian, "make Berkesov. He, it seems, was also promoted to major general. Then the brilliance of democracy in your country will become simply unbearable for the prying eye.

"Listen," Klimov laughed, "do you remember how the late Yuri Vladimirovich, God rest his soul, his benefactor, promised to make him a general when he was just a kid—either a captain or a major?" I don't remember exactly. And look - already a general. Yuri Vladimirovich did not throw words into the wind! He also selected smart people for our service, one might say, in kindergartens. And never wrong.

If we recall what happened with the "Saddam" missiles and the Coyote, then Andropov was not mistaken this time either.

I roughly translated to Trokman what the general said. He smiled and said as he finished his coffee:

- Oh yeah! Andropov was a great man. Minotaur in the labyrinth. He built this labyrinth himself and got entangled in it to such an extent that after his death, the roof had to be removed from this labyrinth in order to sort things out. Gorbachev hoped to do it on his own, but he did not have the strength to even remove the debris from the roof. I had to call the whole world for help. I hope that new people like you, General, will sort out all this nightmare that has accumulated in the labyrinth over the past 75 years.

Klimov, as if not hearing what Bill said, continued to talk about Berkesov, switching back to English:

- An interesting story came out with Berkesov. We sent the President a proposal to confer on him the rank of Major General. His position is now a general's - so there is nothing unusual in this. And the Human Rights Committee of the Supreme Council, run by Sergei Kovalev, who is impatient to return to the camp again, sent Yeltsin his submission, where he demands to remove Berkesov from his post and bring him to trial almost as a war criminal for his deeds in Andropov and post-Andropov time. They, idiots, do not understand that if there were no those times, there would be no present. That we did not imprison them, but gathered them together in camps and took care of them for the future. For them to survive. You remember that according to the sixth and seventh scenarios, all of them - the intellectual flower of the nation - could die in an uncontrolled cataclysm, tentacles

which was still not even theoretically reach out to Mordovia and Perm.

"But there was also an eighth option," I reminded him. - Where they were all supposed to be shot right in the camps. For this, as far as I remember, in each camp there were two excavators in order to dig a mass grave in one night upon receiving the "Forget-Me-Not" signal.

"Well, first of all, they weren't shot," Klimov objected, "but put to sleep. Besides, this eighth option was envisaged only if our plan...

"That's not the point," I protested in turn. "I'm talking about the authorship of this plan, which may well emerge, given the massive defection from your system, the tone for which is set by very informed generals ...

"But I was not at all the author of this plan," Klimov almost got angry. "I just signed it as a document passing through my headquarters. Yes, let them write and lie what they want. Who will believe them now?

Unexpectedly, the general again switched to Russian, taking advantage of the fact that Trokman, getting up from the table, apologized that he needed to call and went to his room.

"Listen, Mike," Klimov said harshly. - That you always want to present me as some kind of bloody executioner who has adapted to new conditions and is building a democrat out of himself? Don't you know that if it weren't for me and a few other people in the KGB, then we would never sit here together. What can I say with my own hands ...

"Here you are, eccentric," I interrupted him. "But I'm worried about you, so that you take into account the possible blows that will inevitably fall on you when you step out of the wings onto the brightly lit stage. We may be thinking of you as the future president of Russia, or whatever you can do in the place of the former USSR. And you are all offended.

"It's a shame, of course," the general replied. "What do you even know about me?" Do you know how much I have done to make our regime more or less human? For example, even when Solzhenitsyn was expelled, I gave him 300 dollars out of my own, one might say, pocket.

- Did you already receive a salary in dollars then? I asked.

"They got it, they didn't get it, but the money was mine," snapped Klimov. - Akhmatova, if you want to know, personally read her "Requiem" aloud to me.

- Did you know Akhmatova personally? I was genuinely surprised.

- What did you think? the general said. - When your "Requiem" was printed, there was an opinion at the top: the old woman should be imprisoned or sent away. I was then assigned this. How would I report, so it would have happened. Well, they brought her to me. I say: how can you, Anna Andreevna, allow yourself such a thing? You are already an elderly person - it will not be sweet at all in the zone, and even on expulsion Same.

And she let me read her "Requiem" aloud. Well, music, of course. You yourself read, you don't understand, but listen ... Yes! So I hushed things up. Like, that's my business. But left her in rest.

"Now I understand," I laughed, "why Solzhenitsyn has not returned to Russia for so long. He just doesn't want to give you \$300.

- Are you all snickering? Klimov continued with resentment in his voice. "I saved Sakharov too. Do not believe?

"I believe, I believe," I said. - I believe everything. You saved Russia, Klimov. Do I not understand this? That is why you are now a colonel-general, and not a defendant, like Kryuchkov, Grushko, Plekhanov and Popkov. I understand everything - don't worry.

At that moment Trokman returned and, taking out a cigar, turned to Klimov:

"Excuse me, General. Did you say something about two submissions made to President Yeltsin regarding one colonel subordinate to you?"

"Yes, yes," Klimov perked up. - So you imagine, gentlemen? We expected, of course, that the president would sign our submission on conferring the title. If only because Kozyrev's submission is written on the letterhead of the Supreme Soviet, the mere sight of which makes Yeltsin disgusted. He usually, without reading, gives all these ideas and attitudes of the Supreme Council to the Secretariat, so that they can be returned back for "revision". And our representations, on the contrary, are read very attentively and benevolently. And what do you think? The President signed both submissions: both ours and Kovalev's! Indeed, something is already going on with his head, according to the irreconcilable opposition ...

I felt my heart skip a beat. Almost openly, Klimov informed us that he had decided to liquidate Berkesov and wanted to hear our opinion on this check.

Damn it, because it is Berkesov who becomes the most unwanted witness, since Klimov is destined to become a minister and go higher. After all, this is precisely why the unfortunate Polyanichko was already removed in order to make room for the President for Heydar Aliyev, who emerged from the fourth dimension.

I looked at Trokman.

He calmly lit a cigar and said, turning to Klimov:

"It seems to me, General, that you are wrong. This method is not new in world practice. I believe that the President deliberately signed both submissions in order to provide you with some kind of creative initiative. He is now watching with interest which course of action you will choose and, apparently, on the basis of the decisions you have made, he will also make the final decision regarding, say, your appointment. In other words, he currently wants to make sure that you are able to make independent decisions and, apparently, is waiting with interest to see what it will be like.

Klimov shot a glance at Trokman and at me.

I know how to control myself well, but it seems that I turned pale, because Trokman left the fate of Berkesov to the discretion of Klimov, that is, he actually sanctioned the liquidation.

What do you think, Mike? Bill asked.

"May all be rewarded according to their sins," I quoted the Holy Scripture.

And the thought was spinning in my head that I could not do anything, since the decision was made at such a high level. Whether I warn Berkesov or not, it won't change anything at all. It may be possible to extend his life by a day, but no more. The monster will still gnaw those tentacles that began to bring him not even pain, but simply discomfort.

"Don't jump to conclusions," I continued. - A subordinate who has two diametrically opposed papers signed by the head of state becomes an ideal employee who can be safely entrusted with any work. In the old days, every sensible operative was charged in absentia with a criminal case and sentenced to

the highest measure. He was not acquainted with the case, but on the verdict he had to sign that he was familiarized. He was informed that the sentence would be carried out when the authorities deemed it necessary. In the meantime, only good work can achieve his permanent reprieve. It is said that this technique brought very effective results ...

"Nonsense," said Klimov. - This was done in a very short period and only in the form of an experiment. But the results were the most deplorable. Almost everyone ran to the enemy, spitting even on the fate of their families. Then, in post-Stalin times, when it was necessary to get rid of the most odious middle-ranking figures, the commandant would simply take them to the basement to, say, sign for new boots and there he would kill him with a shot in the back of the head, and the families would be told that the breadwinner had died in the line of duty. official duties and a pension. In our times - God forbid! Well, you know yourself, Mike - Bondarenko wasn't even shot. He is now somewhere in your place composing some kind of slander against us. I remember how many talkers and traitors have been in recent years. None received more than 10 years.

"Yes," Trokman agreed. You have become very humane. This is good. You need to become even more humane, and then your future is in your hands.

As for their current humanism, I had, of course, my own opinion. But he didn't say anything. In the end, no one thought of making this service more focused on resolving intelligence and counterintelligence tasks, and not on exterminating their own people, and also deploying it, like all of Russia, with a front from west to south, wherever it is for us brought, perhaps, more benefits than Russia. I just felt very sorry for Berkesov. I saw the verdict in Klimov's eyes. I don't know why, but I felt sorry for him. Like a boy who got into bad company and paid with his life for it. After all, if Berkesov believed in anyone, it was only in his own bosses.

And it is so cruelly going to deceive him.

Bill looked at his watch and asked Klimov:

"When is Mr. Torrelli going to wake up?"

"We brought him here by helicopter from Pulkovo around four in the morning. The President instructed me personally to ensure the security of Mr. Torrelli's visit to St. Petersburg. It's all the more gratifying that Mr. Torrelli donated to us several special vehicles used by his security team and a whole bunch of special equipment, including special suits, instruments and special weapons. I have to give you credit, gentlemen. You are truly ahead of the rest...

"All this is very pleasant to hear," said Trokman. "But I asked you, when is Mr. Torrelli going to wake up?"

"I don't know that," replied Klimov. - He went to bed and said that he would give all orders when he woke up.

At that moment there was a resolute knock on the door and three tall, slender men in their thirties in immaculately tailored suits with bow ties and sparkling eyes that only Italians born in the United States have.

"Gentlemen," one of them said. "I'm Giovanni Monso of Mr. Torrelli's security team. Please show me your identification codes to make sure you are authorized to be in the building.

We all, including General Klimov, took out our magnetic cards, under the plastic

covered by our photographs. Mr. Monceau checked them for ID and returned them to us.

"Excelents," he turned to Klimov, "your helicopter, according to your order, is ready to take off.

"Very well," replied Klimov. "Let them be ready for fifteen minutes." Mr. Trokman and I will go to Moscow as soon as we are free. When will Mr. Torrelli need our services? Do you know anything, Giovanni?

"Mr. Torrelli got up and had his breakfast," Giovanni said. Now he has a hairdresser and a doctor. He intends to receive five people today, two of whom are Mr. Throckman and Mr. McIntyre. They will be accepted first. In the afternoon, Mr. Torrelli is scheduled to fly to Helsinki, where his personal Boeing arrives. Appointments start at 11 o'clock. You still have almost an hour, gentlemen. You can go down to the park and take advantage of the fine weather, mansion, if you need anything, then I'm happy to serve you.

Monceau and the guards accompanying him left.

"Only Torrelli's security is in charge here?" I asked Klimov. "Have your people taken over the outer guard?"

"There are no our people on the territory of the mansion," Klimov assured. - And outside, I don't know how Berkesov ordered it there. Probably everything is as usual.

"I speak a little Italian," Bill said. So I'll go for a walk in the park. I hope they don't shoot me.

When Trokman left, Klimov moved closer to me:

Orlov died last night. Suddenly.

— Is that how? I asked. "I saw him recently. He was blazing with health. What do the doctor's say?

"A heart attack," Klimov sighed. - He was nervous because they wanted to take away the premises of his Center from him. Would call me. I would have arranged everything in six seconds. So here it is - and did not live to sixty ...

At the same time, there was no sadness in the eyes of the general. There was a wary question: didn't I finish off Orlov. Klimov was experienced enough to suspect it. But it turned out that he suspects not only me.

"I don't like the whole story," Klimov continued. - The double death of Larsson and Orlov. This echelon. Do you know what happened there?

"I don't know the details yet," I admitted.

"All the escorts were killed by the same weapon, which they did not have in the report card," for some reason the general switched to a whisper. "They killed everyone from one Israeli Uzi machine gun. Nine-millimeter cartridges, bullets soaked in cyanide. Who is this jerk who jumped on the train and killed all the guards?

"He could have snuck into the train at the station," I suggested. "Then he got into the car, found them all drunk or sleeping - you know how they serve, and put them all in one line.

- No! Klimov raised his voice. - They shot back. Almost everyone managed to release half a horn. The whole carriage is riddled with bursts. What do you say to that?

"Don't you think," I laughed, "that I did it?" No, Klimov. The years are not the same. I'm not talking about the fact that such things are strictly forbidden to us. We are still not you. Such actions require permission from the President and Congress.

"All right," Klimov waved his hand. - My brains dirty. President's permission! It's like I don't know about your affairs and yours in particular. But in this case, of course, I'm not thinking about you. This is clearly not your handwriting.

- God bless! - I said. "Because I almost decided to call my lawyer.

"Don't scoff," Klimov grimaced. - It's a very serious matter. Isn't Coyote doing everything?

Coyote is dead, I thought, but I asked aloud:

Do you think it's Coyote? Due to the fact that an Israeli machine gun was used? Here recently Berkesov captured one group of escort trains with strategic raw materials. I looked at the audience. What were they not armed with? They even had a couple of Schmeisser, by the way, under the same cartridge as the Uzi. Trophy reserves, apparently. And to listen to you, some kind of disciplined group from your Committee was going. "According to you, he was known, and this group was armed only with standard-issue weapons. There could not have been an Uzi machine gun there. Did I understand you correctly, Klimov? Was it your people who were going to commit the most heinous crime against the world since the Second World War?"

"Listen, don't rattle," the general interrupted me. Your people are my people! What are you carrying? We tracked these echelons, you know that very well. And the mothers knew the composition of the security group and their weapons. And it is known that no one had Israeli machine guns. And we intended to intercept these echelons in St. Petersburg. You know it too. And who stopped them in Ugrosh is a mystery that I intend to unravel.

"At the same time," I suggested, "guess whether they were going to Petersburg or past through Ugrosh. Whoever stopped them deserves only encouragement. If you think it's a Coyote, get him the Order of Friendship of Peoples from Yeltsin. And I'll get the Nobel Peace Prize for him..."

"What if he does something else like that?" Klimov asked. Can you predict what will come to his mind next?

"If you seriously want to know my opinion," I replied, "then I don't believe that guarding the echelon is Coyote's job. Not his handwriting. Why would he fence a mountain of corpses?"

"So that it would be disrespectful to others," suggested Klimov. - To know how such operations can end. Lots of options here.

Klimov moved even closer to me, and we were already sitting literally forehead to forehead:

"Do you remember," he said in a whistling whisper, "how he disappeared in 1983, when we wanted to liquidate him?" Disappeared. And now he showed up. Where and why? Berkesov told me that you know where he is, where he is hiding? Why don't you let him get it?

- I'm not giving? I was surprised. Berkesov knows the place where he is hiding as well as I do.

"There's no one there," said Klimov seriously. Is this some kind of your fantasy or another trick. The apartment is sealed. She is monitored around the clock. The apartment is empty and no one has appeared there. And this woman disappeared from the hospital. Where does she do? You know?

"I know," I said. - And in it, in essence, the whole snag. He came here to pick her up. This, if I correctly imagine this process, takes at least a week. And they will leave.

- Where will they go? In Paris? Back to Paris? Yes? Beads of sweat glistened over Klimov's eyebrows. It was not at all clear to me that he was so excited, as if Coyote and Jeannette were his relatives. Or he also wanted to go to Paris, where he visited almost every month. Moreover, he knew and understood everything.

"You are a fool, Klimov," I could not restrain myself. "If this is now called Paris, then they will go to Paris. I can see him if you want. And I know better.

Klimov looked at me incredulously.

"I got the impression," I explained, "that he wanted to see me himself. I spoke about this to Berkesov, and you, of course, know this. But one condition is necessary here: a guarantee that your people will not break into it during my visit.

- What if they break in? Klimov asked. - What will happen then?

"Nothing will happen," I shrugged. - They'll take me back. And that's all. Only I don't know anything. Klimov, have your brains been so cemented by Marxism that you don't understand such simple things?

"To be honest, I don't understand," the general replied. I didn't understand then and I don't understand now. And I bet you don't understand either. You just accept this situation as it is, and I can't accept it. It's easy for you to experiment in a foreign country. What if this happened to you, in the States?

"Sometimes things are cleaner in the States," I reassured him. - And even the press does not fall into hysterics about this. Well, in short. Do you understand what you need to do? Order Berkesov to remove surveillance from the house. Fully. Give me a car, and not a single living soul from your department follow me. Take out the hearers who are sitting in the neighboring apartments too - they won't record anything. Do you understand, general?

- When will you go? asked Klimov, rubbing his chin with his hand and pondering something.

"As soon as I'm free of Torrelli," I replied. "I can go right away if you do everything I said.

"Aren't you afraid he'll kill you?" Klimov suddenly asked.

- Me? I was surprised. Why do I need him? Besides, he could have done it a long time ago if he wanted to. No. Not afraid. Just don't ask me. "Mike, take me with you" jumps in your eyes. Nothing will work.

"Good," said Klimov. — Go. I will do everything as you said. Let's see what happens.

"Agreed," I looked at my watch. - I'm going to get some air. Give me the car keys when the meeting at Torrelli's is over.

But it was not possible to breathe air. I did not have time to go out into the foyer, where I hung in the wall

a portrait of Lenin in a clerical frame (never removed, despite Topchak's assurances), when he heard a joyful voice behind him: "Misha, dear! Hi! I didn't expect to see you!" I must admit that I also did not expect to see him, being sure that he is not currently in Russia. With a lion's mane of graying hair, smiling into his imposing mustache, Boris Berson himself stood between the bronze getters, reminiscent of Albert Einstein in the luxurious medieval interior of the foyer at the time of his reception in the Swedish royal palace after receiving the Nobel Prize. The analogy with Einstein was not accidental. Not only did Berson look like a great physicist, but he had a mind no less great than Einstein's, and if this mind was directed to scientific research, I am ready to swear that Berson would be no less famous than Einstein. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately: Einstein invented the atomic bomb, and Berson could come up with something worse, his brain worked in a completely different direction.

In the old days, Boris Berson was the director of a radio plant in Vilnius and a member of the bureau of the city committee of the CPSU. This was precisely the period when it became clear to many in the upper echelon of the communist elite, including Yuri Andropov himself, that the Soviet Union was ready to collapse at any moment, burying under its ruins the entire communist paradise that the elite had so lovingly built for itself over the course of 70 years on the bones of several generations of Russian people. Then the idea, interesting in its boldness, was born to dismantle the USSR without waiting for its collapse, preserving and even increasing the power and wealth of the ruling party. The idea assumed in the future a new montage of the Empire, but "on a fundamentally new basis," as the secret documents said. No one really knew what this "new basis" was, but everyone, as usual, pretended to understand everything thoroughly.

We already then began to introduce into their plans those small errors that would have made the proposed installation of the empire in the future very problematic, to say the least - impossible.

One of these errors was Boris Berson. The Party gave him the greatest confidence. He was supposed to leave the USSR legally on an Israeli visa and establish a number of front companies and banks in the West, where he could transfer the enormous values of the CPSU without any hindrance and, of course, without any suspicion, thus connecting the gigantic Party-Chekist octopus to the world economy. Outwardly, this plan looked so flawless that it gave the impression of not even connecting the CPSU to the world economy, but connecting the world economy to the CPSU. All the calculations of this gang, starting from 1917, were destroyed by their blatant illiteracy and complete ignorance of the world around them, its life and the laws of development, relationships in politics, economics, and even everyday life. It was like a conversation between cockroaches trying to get into a jar of jam and not suspecting that the jar was left open on purpose so that they would never get out of it. This is how all their global operations collapsed. I have already mentioned that, while preparing a fatal blow for us in the Persian Gulf - a blow that was theoretically impossible to parry, the Soviets, for reasons that they still do not understand, plunged into the Afghan adventure. This is one and the same scheme, it must be said that it is not very complicated, but it always works flawlessly when a medieval empire, even armed with the latest technology, tries to confront the countries of the 20th century.

So, and maybe even worse happened this time.

Berson, without violating a single letter of the instructions given to him, founded branches of the Siabeco company in the USA, Canada and Switzerland, the owner of which he was officially registered. In parallel, he created several Siabeko banks. The very word "Siabeko" does not contain anything mystical. This is an abbreviation based on the names of Berson's children - Simon-Yitzhak-Alex, and then comes - Berson and Co. "Ko" in this case was the CPSU. In a shorter and more sonorous name, the company could have been called "Berson and the CPSU", but here the sacred principle of conspiracy would be violated, without which the CPSU could not exist until

your last breath.

The money of the CPSU, feverishly transferred abroad, went to the Siabeco banks, and the firm's branches offered intermediary services around the world for the purchase of all types (and in any quantity) of strategic raw materials. The source was not named, but it was clear to any baby that such a quantity of raw materials at bargain prices (thanks to practically slave labor) could only be offered by the world's first country of the victorious proletariat. The money for the sold raw materials, of course, also went to the accounts of "Siabeco", where "Ko" received its own percentage (75%), and "Siabe" its own - 25%. Live and be happy!

But the mistake was that the system of banking structures in the USA and Canada on the one hand, and in Switzerland on the other, is such that the Siabeco banks were actually under the control of the banking system of Mr. Torrelli in the New World and the Swiss gnomes in Europe. This meant the end of the economic independence of the USSR, and consequently the end of its political independence. Did Burson understand this? I am ready to swear that I understood, but did not report anything to Moscow about this, since no one asked him about it. Having entered the system of world banks, the Siabeco network sharply increased its working capital, which caused delight in Moscow comparable only to the delight of the Australian natives when Captain Cook showed them how to smoke a pipe.

It is completely incomprehensible to me why the wise men from the CPSU decided that Burson and Torrelli were working together for them, but the increase in banking services and demand for raw materials on an unprecedented scale accelerated the "dismantling" of the USSR, since each of the communist nobles was in a hurry not to miss an opportunity to swim in the ghostly golden rays of big business.

The operation assumed such proportions that Burson realized the need to coordinate all operations directly from Moscow in order to save the world market from chaos. To legalize it in Moscow, they urgently began to create a local branch of the Siabeko company. This case was taken up by none other than Nikolai Kruchina, the then manager of the Central Committee of the CPSU, who was directly subordinate to the General Secretary of the Central Committee, the first and last President of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev. Kruchina's consultant in this very delicate matter at that time was KGB Colonel Veselovsky, an officer of the First Main Directorate (foreign intelligence). For many years, Colonel Veselovsky worked in countries where the activity of Communist parties was prohibited by law. Veselovsky created legal economic sources of existence for these underground parties and developed various methods of laundering party money received either from the USSR or through ordinary robbery. Even if the legal communist parties never wanted to reckon with the laws of their countries, then for the underground the law was and even more so was not written. Here they traded in weapons, and drugs, and slaves, any stolen goods, they rowed their own from prostitutes and from gambling houses.

But all these were, of course, trifles in comparison with what the CPSU planned to do, going underground and dreaming no more no less of how to rule the world from the underground, which it so wanted and always lacked while on the surface. The sunlight was very blinding, it was drawn back to the basement, from where they jumped out like rats to gnaw the bones of the dying Russian Empire.

Colonel Veselovsky knew his business and immediately understood what they wanted from him. He quickly drew up instructions for action for the slow-thinking Kruchina, where the laundering of party money, which was not amenable to any control, was talentedly provided for. To begin with, a joint venture was created, where on the one hand the "Swiss-Canadian" company "Siabeko" acted, and on the other - the Union of Afghanistan Veterans. Together they were called "Siabeko Group". , airline, international trading house, fund

privatization, a network of holding companies that spread their tentacles to all regions of the country. A significant part of the profits, of course, the CPSU intended for itself. The governments of the United States and Canada watched with interest all this international activity, but did not intervene, since Mr. Torrelli promised a sharp decrease in the prices of strategic raw materials and a strong recovery of the Western economy as a result of these operations and was not mistaken. When the dismantled remnants of the Soviet Union finally collapsed, such a global work had already been done to transfer the country's national wealth (which for some reason was considered the property of the CPSU) to the West that the process became almost irreversible.

Kruchina had to be liquidated (thrown out of the window), and Colonel Veselovsky disappeared. It was said that he, too, had been killed. Even his immediate superior, who headed the intelligence of Russia, Academician Primakov (a friend of Gorbachev and a participant in all of the above operations), without batting an eyelid, declared that he knew nothing about the whereabouts of Colonel Veselovsky. Freed newspapers spread the disinformation that the fugitive colonel had been seen in Canada. In reality, of course, the colonel did not run away, but simply went to Zurich, where he began working as president of one of the Siabeco banks ("cash points" in the words of Mr. Torrelli). In Moscow, he and the late Kruchin were replaced by the returned Boris Berson. I don't want to go into unnecessary details here, but Boris Berson can safely be called the architect of an unprecedented new economic miracle in the West. It was him, and not Mr. Torrelli, since "Papa Luigi" only financed the operation, but did not know (and could not know) the whole situation in the country, like Burson.

As a result, raw materials poured from Russia to Western markets in an unprecedented flow at an unprecedentedly cheap price, and the money for this raw material remained in Mr. Torrelli's banks, spinning in the circulation of the Western economy. The history of human civilization did not know this yet. All the conquests of the past, which are insanely expensive, bearing countless human and material losses, overstraining the economy and the fall of universal morality in many years of wars, turned out to be completely insignificant in comparison with what was done in the former Soviet Union by simply moving money from one bank to another. . The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which had gone underground, never cared deeply about the easily captured Russia, and now did not want to keep its money at home, preferring to invest it in the economy of the West, to keep it in the West, receiving compensation in the form of some kind of real estate, free accounts, gold credit cards, five-star hotels, and all the other trifles they've starved for in their 70 years in power.

The situation was so fabulous that all your romantic presidents from Theodore to Franklin Roosevelt, who believed more in a club than in a dollar, did not even dare to dream about it. Torrelli and Burson raised the dollar to such an unattainable height, taking advantage of the commodity hunger in plundered Russia, that if the romantic presidents were alive, they would certainly have ordered in the famous canyon, next to the three great profiles, to knock out the fourth - Boris Burson.

But such a situation was so objectively improbable that, in fact, it could not continue not only forever, but even long enough. Any government, be it left or right, democratic or fascist, should immediately stop such an open and ruthless plunder of the country. And therefore, such a situation could only continue under conditions of complete anarchy, which Berson established in Russia, demonstrating the bright talent of not only a great strategist, but also a no less great organizer.

Burson succeeded in completely subordinating the country's Supreme Soviet to his will, placing it in implacable opposition to President Yeltsin's command. In the executive branch, he managed to put under the control of key power ministers, including the minister of security, and even the vice president.

One of the newspapers even placed large portraits of Burson and General Rutskoy on the front page, providing them with the signature: president and vice president. However, the entire power of the outbreak of the scandal fell on the vice president, and Burson only chuckled. The trouble lay elsewhere. Whatever benefits anarchy promised to Torrelli and Burson, it began to produce side effects that were potentially very dangerous, because they already threatened the integrity of Russia itself. The weakening of the center and the strengthening of the regions began a break in the Russian territory. Inflated prices for energy and transport isolated the regions, forced them to ignore Moscow and look for their own ways of salvation. The impending chaos could destroy the great business of Mr. Torrelli, and therefore he allowed himself to cross the ocean to listen to the consultations of two interested parties: his representative for the former USSR, Burson, and representatives of the US government, which he considered Trokman and me. The agenda, apparently, should have been the following question: how to restore the power of the center in Russia and not lose those fabulous profits that anarchy gives. Papa Luigi decided to personally look into this issue.

XVII

"The process has started," Burson said, laughing, shaking my hand. "Luigi called you in to report, too?"

"More likely to be removed from office," I laughed in response. "He really dislikes government officials who allow themselves to do something in his private estates. He assured someone in the State Department that everything on the territory of the former USSR belongs to him personally. That he already bought everything.

- All, maybe not, - Berson answered, - but all - that's for sure. While spending only half a percent of their six-month profits.

"It seems to me," I disagreed, "that you bought them all without Mr. Torrelli. You only need to read the newspapers to have an equestrian statue of you on the roof of the World Trade Center in New York.

"You're exaggerating, as always," Berson smiled modestly. "I never set myself such a goal. President Yeltsin's team is very hard to buy. They know their worth. Don't forget, they all come from the top echelon of the party nomenklatura, some hereditary nomenklatura, and already had everything by August 1991: bank accounts, villas, and estates in Switzerland. They already had a whole army of lawyers and figureheads. They have been accustomed to dollars since childhood, and the bucks no longer arouse in them that sacred awe that it causes in almost everyone in this country. Their only downside was that they were all insanely lazy and incompetent. Until the end of their days, they will retain the style of work of the regional committee secretaries, for whom all the work is done by the apparatus at the level of instructors. They have absolutely no idea where they are leading the country. Well, just babies in the jungle hoping to meet a good panther. Therefore, you can convince them of anything. The main thing is to observe the ritual familiar to them. Hang diagrams with different curves and percentages there. They will nod their heads importantly and ask questions intelligently, such as "by what percent will the final output increase?" But look into their eyes! There is such a void that even I get scared. Once upon a time, say, in Andropov's times, they were at least afraid of something. Now they have reached the limit of their dream: they are not afraid of anything and no one, they have brilliantly learned not to react to the media, no matter how revealing details get there, and they degenerate directly

on the eyes.

"Perhaps," Berson chuckled, "the only one you can still work with is the so-called post-putch nominees, who ended up mainly in the Supreme Soviet. Well, several people made their way into the government. Smart people immediately after the putsch advised Yeltsin to disperse the Supreme Soviet and call new elections sometime in the future. But we advised him against this - they say that President Bush, whom he adored, might be offended for such a violation of democracy. The old deputies, who have been sitting there since time immemorial, are cautious and quiet people, moderately greedy, constituting the so-called "swamp". But they understand very well that if they lose their deputy mandates in the current situation, they will have to go straight to the cemetery, because they don't know how to do anything and don't want to. Unless at the right time to raise your hands. Now they have been taught to use the electronic voting system, and even then about every third person who votes for everyone has learned this. They constituted a kind of citadel, which is impregnable from any side and silent as a hearse. No lawmaking and no creativity, pyramid of Cheops.

Another thing is the new deputies who made their way to the Supreme Soviet on the wave of Gorbachev's reforms and democratic slogans. They all lived in Soviet shit, most of them in the provinces, and when they saw the prospects that opened up before them, they were already breathless, and their eyes darkened with fear that all this could be lost in if they are re-elected. Yeltsin did not immediately disperse the parliament why? He, one might say, took out all of his leadership from the shit and counted on their loyalty. How! As soon as they began to grab everything that lies badly, they forgot about everything. You should have seen what happened to this poor horseman when he was brought to the nomenklatura apartment. I thought I would die. He had never seen anything like it before, even in his dreams. He squealed something in his own way and went galloping around the rooms. And there are even three toilets. Well, they did the same with other youngsters. Like, if the guys do not want to lose all this, do what you are told: leave these laws, and torpedo the rest.

Something similar happened to the vice president. Who was he? A supernumerary colonel who made a name for himself by bombing villages in Afghanistan, and even then managed to be shot down twice. Well, I would become a general for my exploits - and nothing more. But Shaposhnikov liked him for some reason, and he recommended him to Yeltsin on the eve of the coup by someone like a liaison officer. Yeltsin is slow-witted, but in some cases completely unpredictable. And in this case too. An official was sent to him for instructions, but again he misunderstood something and dragged him into the vice-presidential position, again, apparently, counting on personal loyalty. And miscalculated again.

Yeltsin, when he created his administration, strictly and sincerely followed and demanded that his employees renounce any privileges and from participation in various dark affairs, promising not to offend them with the drafted law on civil servants. Most of them agreed with the president, because even in communist times they grabbed so much that they were no longer able to digest. I'm not talking about communist privatization. Thank God, he himself participated in it!

Whom the president did not think about is the new people who appeared in his environment, so to speak, from the very bottom. From the level there of various colonels and doctors of various sciences, who at one time received 400-600 rubles. In the dignitary society of the former party nomenklatura, they had a very hard time. Firstly, they were looked at as if they were servants who, on the occasion of some great holiday, were allowed into the living room, where they had the right only to shift from foot to foot and wait for a glass of vodka to be brought to them from the master's table. They had no dachas, no mansions, no estates, no bank accounts. I'm not talking about real estate in the West, or about the shares of large companies and much more. It was a shame, of course. I took all of them on their greed and complexes and got my hands on it.

The first is the vice president. He is a very mediocre person, to put it mildly, outlook

none, but ambitions are bursting. His head is spinning from an unprecedented rise and he already sees himself as the savior of the fatherland, and he feels the proletarian's class hatred for the nobles towards the president and his entourage. With this, you can do anything. He has no culture and no ethics either. His mother sold beer in Kursk - so he did not go far from her. I remember seeing my Rolex watch, and my eyes sparkled so much — he wanted to. Wow, savages! The vice president of a superpower behaves like a child at the sight of an alarm clock that is not even worth three thousand dollars. I gave them to him. Taken from hand and donated. What happened here, "Boris Iosifovich! Boris Iosifovich! I won't forget a century," and he was talking other nonsense. Further more.

Yet they were poor. Since there is a chance to live like a human, who will refuse? Only those who are already fed up. And we are doing our job. Raw materials go to the West by Niagara Falls, and the treasury does not receive a shish. All proceeds in the West remain in the accounts of the former CPSU. It's not safe to keep money here. Tomorrow some general Sevryugin will come to power and take everything for himself, saying at the same time that he is acting for the good of the people. Those who were not understanding were told - whoever has dollars, send them away from sin to the West.

Gerashchenko also helped us here - a great man and unsinkable. Back in the days of Gorbachev, we were doing such things through the Central Bank that even you would not believe! As a result, even Yeltsin realized that the country had turned into a bucket without a bottom. Where are the loans, where is the currency, where is the proceeds from oil, gas, coal, ore and all that? He ordered to sort it out and issued several formidable decrees. And the Supreme Council declared them unconstitutional. We already had everything under control - both the Supreme Council and the Constitutional Court. The president was furious: what a mess in the country, and almost fell under impeachment. Here, the mafia that makes money on raw materials is especially trying: from Tyumen, from Kemerovo, from Norilsk. All former First Secretaries. They won't let go of theirs. Yeltsin to his vice president: head the anti-corruption commission. Laughter!

I have already taken him and the top of the Supreme Soviet, together with the most noisy deputies from the young, a couple of times abroad, showed how people live. He gave them money for mansions. He privatized all the apartments in Moscow. What else do you guys want? Are the elevators marble, mirrored? Please. Become lifelong deputies. I won't say a word. Raise salary? How many? Million a month. It's a thousand dollars. The unemployed get more in the States. For God's sake! What else? What do you want! Just hold on and don't miss the president's nonsense. But they are also on their own minds: "Boris Iosifovich, money is needed for this or that."

The vice-president, from his inferiority complex, cut himself a hectare of land and began to build something monstrously tasteless on it about three floors with swimming pools, courts (although he does not play tennis, unlike the president), garages and guard rooms. Such construction projects of the century never end, so money is constantly needed for them. I tell him, let me open an account for you in Switzerland for three million. You put them into circulation and earn money, and if necessary, you will give them away. Agreed. This is the money he earned. Have you seen somewhere in 50 centuries of human history a vice president who almost obscenely hides his president and does not resign at the same time, assuring that he was elected by the people. Only I created such a vice president! Beauty!

But then Yeltsin's patience snapped, and he decided to expel his vice president. But how? This is the zest, that only the Supreme Council can expel him, and they are smeared with one world-tied. But Yeltsin is not blind either. He sees: where did he get the mansion, "Mercedes" and various other tsatski. On what money do the deputies live like kings and travel around the world? And then there's the Vice President had a fight with the Minister of Security. That wife went to Switzerland with some friend of mine with my money. You can't imagine the level: you bought some twenty-dollar bags and cheap fur coats and let's speculate here. And the KGB does not like the minister as an outsider, and immediately his own subordinates handed him over. And he take it and hand over the vice president that he has an account in a Swiss bank. Has begun

terrible scandal. My grandmother used to call such people "Tsores Goyim". These are people who fought over money received from a Jew and ended up in the police. They confessed to everything and the police fined the Jew for giving them money. And so it happened here. I was in Zurich when the vice-president burned like a fool and couldn't think of anything better than to rush to the Supreme Soviet and yell to the whole world that he had 11 suitcases of compromising information on the entire presidential entourage. Although he has nothing, of course. In his position, it remains only to bluff, and he does not know how to bluff, because by Nature he is very stupid and greedy. Eventually, of course, my name appeared in print. I returned to Moscow and told him, the vice-president of free Russia: "What are you, a cop? Why are you ratting everyone out?" And he has already lost his head from fear and yells: "Yes, I am a cop, if you want! I will expose everyone!" Typical "tsores-goy". I called Klimov. He laughs: "I warned you. Borya, do not mess with fools and chumps. And don't worry. You close their accounts and everything will calm down." Everything would be fine, but here he calls me. 1989, plays in this whole story? I mean the global undertaking "dismantling-assembly". This is no longer a joke ...

— And how much did all this top dressing of the best people cost you? I asked.

"Not very expensive," Berson waved his hand. - Mr. Torrelli allowed me to spend 5% of the profit on these things, but I always fit into two percent, or even one and a half. All this is very cheap, given the fabulous difference between the ruble and the dollar. The Central Bank and the Supreme Council, we must give them their due, I mean the financiers from the team of Gerashchenko and Khazsbulatov - great criminal minds: they managed to cut off the ruble from the main wealth of the country - from strategic raw materials, and tie it to commodity and computer support, turning it into ultimately to nothing. All this is due to the fact that there is not a single competent person in the government. Most of them do not even know what a ruble is. They never used it. So you interrupted me. The president himself calls me and says something like this: "Boris Iosifovich, in 1989 it was about dismantling the USSR so that it would not collapse and crush us all under its rubble. It was believed that it would be easier to reform certain parts of the USSR to meet the needs of the free market and political democracy, after which to carry out the installation or integration on a new basis. In 1993, this installation was supposed to begin. However, this installation not only does not begin, but it seems that you are also planning the dismantling of Russia itself. What has become the subject of publicity lately? "Mr. President," I answered him. "You used the expression 'you conceived it there.' "I carried out and am fulfilling a party order, a task, if you like. You were the secretary of the regional committee in Sverdlovsk, and I was a member of the bureau of the city committee in Vilnius. You received the task of becoming the president of the new Russia, and I - to ensure the free passage of the sums and funds belonging to the party to Western banks and to the world market so that the party finds a place in the world economy. And no one initiated me into more global tasks. I think that no one has any doubts that I conscientiously, to the best of my ability, carry out the assignment, trying at the same time not to break the law and not to attract unnecessary attention to their activities ... "

"That's why you don't break the laws," the President interrupted me, "because there are simply no laws in the country now. You have led Russia to a political, economic and constitutional dead end where it is impossible to regulate any processes. And this will inevitably lead to the dismemberment of Russia itself, which was not envisaged by any initial plans. All this can lead to an explosion and the coming to power of fascist and nationalist groups."

"Sorry," I said. "But with fascist groups, you can scare the President of the United States, but not me. You must have forgotten that, at your request, I support Zyuganov, and Ampilov, and Makashov, and even Sevryugin, Yakushev, and Barkashov with party money, so that

create visibility in the West about the presence in the new Russia of the entire political spectrum, as befits a democratic country. This, of course, is a penny, and if I mentioned it at all, it is only because you started talking about the threat to democracy. Once again, I beg your pardon, Mr. President, I am just an executor, an intermediary, if you like, in whom the party has given confidence, perhaps even more than he deserves. I have no right to express my own opinion on these issues, since the right to an opinion must be earned, as they used to say at our city committee bureau. But I will allow myself to convey to you the opinion that prevails in circles known to you about the situation in the country. You know very well that the "dismantling" of the USSR was a forced measure. The new "montage" was envisioned on a wholly democratic basis, turning the former USSR into something like the United States in structure, with the hope of an equally rapid rise in productivity and economic power. But the basis for all this, I repeat, was to be democracy, because without it, that is, without a foundation, it is impossible to build anything. Again, I dare to remind you that you yourself offered yourself for the role of the first democratic president of Russia, assuring that you will cope with your task. Moreover, you proposed candidates for all key positions in Russia, and all these people, almost without exception, were approved on your recommendation, as well as all the other "presidents" in the republics of the former USSR. Of course, not everything went smoothly everywhere during the "dismantling", but these are details and everything will eventually straighten out. The point is different. It's about democracy, excuse me for importunity. That the feudal-military empire was not ready for democracy, either politically or economically, was clear to everyone. Everyone also knew that there was not even a theoretical transition from totalitarianism to democracy. But it turned out that there is not a single person in the country, including the unforgettable Academician Sakharov and the now living almost apostle Solzhenitsyn, who would think democratically. Those brought up in a cage do not fight for freedom, because they have a very vague idea about it, but for the right to turn from the oppressed into the oppressors. You, Mr. President, are perhaps the best that could be found for your post in these troubled times. But even you understand very little what democracy is. With every thought, every action, even every urge, you may unconsciously strive for personal dictatorship. You chose your own people. It is not your fault, but your misfortune that these people turned out to be cunning, stupid, greedy and overly ambitious. Mr. Khasbulatov even more frankly, consciously, strove for personal dictatorship, trying to shine on you. Your vice-president, to whom in the old days you would have entrusted the collective farm, already sees himself as the autocrat of all Russia. What would happen if you turned out to be stronger and, having listened to some of your smart advisers, dragged the unfortunate speaker out of the White House by the legs, took him to Balashikha and shot him in front of the red berets? Or would they hand him over in handcuffs to General Dudayev to be publicly burned on Comintern Square in Grozny in the name of Allah, the Great and Merciful? What would happen if you, Lord President, were dragged out of the Kremlin in handcuffs, which, as you probably know, many dream of, put on trial and hanged publicly on Red Square in the name of Christ the Savior? Everything would instantly return to normal. You would get back a plucked empire without the Warsaw Pact, an empire that no one would be afraid of anymore, which would make tanks, drive tanks and eat these tanks, snacking on chemical and bacteriological weapons. By and large, the world would even benefit from it. But to prevent anything like this from happening, we, excuse me, made it so that both you and the Supreme Council would find themselves in a stalemate and would influence the situation in the country as little as possible with their decrees and laws. People must wake up from the stress of supreme power. Even though it still gives a lot of negative effects, such as an increase in crime, it also gives a lot of positive effects, awakening initiative and initiative, developing freedom of the press, assembly, creating the beginnings of political parties and much more. This process will be very long, painful and difficult, and we are unlikely to live to the end. What is happening now in Russia is, so to speak, educational democracy. Arrange elections, re-elections, adopt or repeal Constitutions, look for compromises, learn to listen to the most unpleasant things about each other, wean yourself from shouting:

"Immediately

ban! Plant! Shoot!" The fact that Russia can fall apart, I, Mr. President, I'm sorry, I do not believe. It seems so to you, because Moscow is losing its former power and authority as the capital of the empire. I do not see anything wrong with this. In the United States For example, many people have the vaguest idea, and even from a high school course, of what the city of Washington is and what federal officials, including the president, do there. And in the atom is the essence of America's power and optimism.

He listened to me, turning purple more and more, and I already began to fear that he would now order me to be taken straight to the Kremlin courtyard and shot somewhere near the Tsar Cannon. But no. He apparently overcame himself and said:

— Boris Iosifovich, you are a very smart person. Tell me, what do you see my main mistake?

"The inability to create your own team," I replied. - The main support of the president is his team, a team of like-minded people, and not the courtyard of the Byzantine emperor, where it is worth bringing at least someone closer to the throne, as he already strives to climb on it.

"So you're not advising me to declare a state of emergency?" he asked, as if he really needed my advice.

"I don't recommend it from the bottom of my heart," I replied. - This method only seems very easy and simple. But in reality it will only give rise to a mass of new problems and new Bonapartes. But will not add a penny to the treasury.

I could see in his eyes that he was not completely convinced. I bet you can't guess what the last question he asked me was when I was on my way to the door.

"Boris Iosifovich," he asked, "tell me, did you really give the vice-president a Rolex watch?"

By the way, he also has a Rolex on his arm.

"Yes," I answered guiltily. - I already understand that I made a mistake, Mr. President. I promise you not to do anything like that in the future... Tell me, Mike, is there another country where the vice president cannot report where he got his watch from? But, it seems, it was in Russia that watches were always awarded for excellent service?

It seems to me that I have not laughed so much in a long time as I listened to Burson's story.

"Boris," I suggested. - Write me this story and we will publish it in some American magazine specializing in black humor.

"The copyright is not with me," Berson replied, "but with the characters in my story. As a result, the picture is simply wonderful. The President and his team are dragging Russia into the market like a broken caterpillar bulldozer. And his opponents (well, aren't they idiots!) are still pulling this bulldozer back, solely to annoy the president. They have no program, except for the cries of the restoration of the USSR. And they still want to be seen as serious people. I, too, for example, would not mind restoring the Russian Empire in the short period of the last 10 years of the reign of Nicholas II - the only period when Russian rubles were hunted on all exchanges in the world.

"It will pass," I reassured him. - In France, some psychos are still roaming, demanding the restoration of Bonaparte's empire within the borders of 1812. In addition, they are always squabbling with the adherents of the Bourbons, who has more rights to the French crown. Who is interested? Only tourists - lovers of the exotic.

Burson was about to say something to this, when Giovanni Monso's polishedly polite voice sounded behind us:

"Gentlemen, Mr. Torrelli is waiting for you.

We followed the bodyguard through a gallery hung with old paintings and models of edged weapons.

- Where are you going from here? Burson asked me.

"If Trokman does not force me to fly with him to Moscow, then home," I answered. - And you?

"I'm going to Moscow," said Berson. - I flew in with Klimov. I'll probably go with him. There is something restless in my heart. How would this one, - he stammered, - how would this bear not break the firewood. He is already in a rage, sitting on a chain.

The room where Giovanni led us must have once served as a library for the Grand Duke. Enormous mahogany bookcases rose around the perimeter of the room, entwined with graceful ladders, galleries with finely carved railings. The cupboards were, of course, empty. Only in one of them lay a pile of some kind of office books. Beneath the galleries were sofas upholstered in green velvet, inlaid with tarnished gold intricate designs. In the middle of the room stood a large table covered with green cloth, and around it were chairs with frightening backs almost as tall as a man. On the table stood a bronze candlestick depicting some old man in a chlamys with a compass in one hand and some kind of whistle in the other. In the wall between the curtained windows hung pictures in which sailing ships fired cannons at each other.

At the head of the table sat Mr. Torrelli, without a jacket, but in a waistcoat and tie, looking around in surprise. Beside him sat Bill with an unlit cigar in his hands.

"It's like a warehouse of old furniture," said Mr. Torrelli. "Before the war, Chicago also liked to meet secretly in various warehouses and hangars. I was told that local guys know a lot about conspiracies ...

"No, Luigi," Bill laughed. This mansion once belonged to a relative of the local king. They just wanted to impress you and emphasize that they treat you like a crowned lady.

"Yes," the great financier sighed. — I heard that they are very fond of dollars. Even more than their own country. Michelo," he said, as I understood it to me. - Michelo, son, I was told that you have been working at this dump for a very long time, which I was persuaded to buy.

"Yes, sir," I said modestly. - I've been working here for a long time.

"Don't call me sir," Mr. Torrelli scowled. "Just call me Luigi. And if you were raised well in childhood, then papa Luigi."

— Should I kiss the ring? I asked. - And immediately become a member of the family?

"You've seen enough bad movies," the banker smiled. "It's been a long time since anyone performed stupid rituals. Everything is simple, but with great willingness, they sign financial documents. Willy," he turned to Trokman, "turn on the tape, please."

Bill gave me a reproachful look, got up and turned on the TV, which was on a small table that I didn't notice at first. I don't know who prepared this material for Papa-Lundzhi: Trokman, Klimov, Berson or someone else, but it looked very impressive.

Georgian "Grad" installations thrashed the Abkhazian positions with rapid fire, Abkhazian heavy guns hit the pearl of the Black Sea - Sukhumi. Ancient houses and hotels in flames. The large landing craft built for the Marine landings in Florida or Louisiana carry out the wounded, women and children under fire. Angry faces, shaggy hats, spotted overalls, machine guns, machine guns, tanks crushing vineyards, combat aircraft designed to intercept our strategic bombers, bombing their own cities, helicopters burning in the sky and on the ground, corpses, bandaged children, girls with torn off feet, mothers wrestling in hysterics over the corpses of their sons. Installations of the "Katyusha" type in various modifications, erasing towns and villages from the earth ...

Bleek - and a new volume. Armenian tanks terribly and indomitably marching along mountain roads, volleys of heavy guns, burning Aghdam, thousands, tens of thousands of refugees fleeing in panic somewhere to the borders of Iran and Turkey. Burning villages, charred corpses, in the entrails of which dogs swarm, again Grad installations, sweeping away all living things from the face of the earth, combat helicopters, shelling the villages with rocket projectiles with salvo fire, unshaven faces in earflaps, helmets, landing berets, burning eyes, tears, flowing over overgrown faces, flames devouring gardens and fields, mothers beating over the torn corpses of babies, warplanes dropping napalm bombs on citrus groves ...

Blik - ditches, in the muddy waters of which the corpses of children float. Severed heads of Russian border guards eaten by dogs, sobbing sobbing guys in military uniforms, miraculously surviving during another massacre on the Afghan border, Grad installations sweeping Tajik and Afghan villages from the face of the earth, executions of civilians by no one knows who, or by Russian soldiers, either by KGB agents of the communist regime in Dushanbe, or by opposition fighters. Bearded Afghans in turbans, wrapped in machine-gun belts with Kalashnikovs in one hand and with someone's heads in the other. The imperturbable faces of the mullahs calling to Allah. The shot young face of the Russian Minister of Defense, catapulted from major general to army general after the coup. Combat helicopters firing volleys at something incomprehensible below ...

I have seen all this many times already, but the film put together looks scary. "But all this power," flashed through my head, "was preparing to fall on the world, and fell on them themselves. Is there some kind of higher justice here?"

But the tape continued. Crowds of Chinese - thousands of them - captivating Russian villages in Primorye. The bloodied faces of Russian border guards and policemen beaten with sticks while trying to check the documents of the Chinese. Rusting and neglected ships of the Pacific Fleet, anchored and barreled in a cramped bay. Some with flags, some without. Japanese tugboats dragging them one by one for scrapping. The cunning faces of Greek merchants who buy unique rescue and hydrographic vessels from rogue admirals for a quarter of the price of currency. The funeral of Pacific sailors who died of starvation, as the command sold all food supplies to commercial structures. Explosions, terrible explosions, somewhat reminiscent of footage of the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The arsenals of the Pacific Fleet are on fire, combat missiles, torpedoes, mines and shells of all calibers take off and burst into the air. Quiet bays, where decommissioned nuclear submarines stand side by side. Some have already sunk. There is no money and funds for their proper cutting ...

Burning forests, burning fields, burning wagons, overturned tanks, blown up blast furnaces. Crowds of people who have not been able to get out of the zone of nuclear disasters for the fifth year already. Fields overgrown with weeds, abandoned villages, unfinished construction. Dying children, retarded children, disabled children. Crazy eyes of mothers and sad, like those of old people, the eyes of children. Refugee trains gutted by some guys

semi-Asian-semi-Caucasian species. Sobbing women, beaten and murdered men. Again explosions, terrible, rising high into the sky, fragments flying in all directions - the arsenals of the Northern Fleet in Severomorsk are exploding. Warships without fuel and hopes...

OMON with shields and batons, dispersing some crowd with red flags and portraits of Levin-Stalin. The expressionless face of the president with slowly moving lips, the narcotic sparkling eyes of the speaker yelling something into the hall, the Jesuit physiognomy of the chairman of the Central Bank Gerashchenko, with a grin explaining the essence of his financial policy, shifty eyes and the timid face of the chairman of the Constitutional Court Zorkin in a fake robe, stupid the look and dashing mustache of the Vice President. Palaces, mansions, three-story dachas, Volvos, Mercedes, Rolls-Royces, briefcases stuffed with dollars and Deutschmarks, balls, presentations, Cardin fashions, McDonald hamburgers, diamonds from Amsterdam, General Dynamic stocks, cars pierced with automatic bursts, some thugs standing with raised hands at gunpoints, mountains of weapons, old women standing in long lines with banknotes clutched in their hands, old men dying right on the central streets of the capital, posters: "Communism is a secular the embodiment of Christianity", the smiling face of Mikhail Gorbachev, in whose fund the police are searching ...

And again the face of Viktor Gerashchenko.

The frame stopped. Gerashchenko remained on the screen.

"The only person," said Mr. Torrelli, "to deal with in this country.

"Sure," said Burson. - In any other country, he would probably have been hanged twice and shot three times.

"Yes," I agreed. - If anyone destroyed the Soviet Union, then it is, of course, he. But don't forget, gentlemen, that he was a performer. He pumped all the blood of the former Union to the West and pumped new blood from the West, bought at exorbitant prices. Remember his famous transfers, when he sold the whole country at least three times to the last cobblestone.

"I gave him a billion dollars," Mr. Torrelli smiled. — I don't think it's very expensive. He promised to soon bring the dollar to 2,500 rubles. I keep a whole army of his bums in my banks and in the International Monetary Fund who do nothing but buy houses, lots and used cars. They don't have the slightest idea what it means in the West to stick one's head in a noose of real estate without having the money to pay taxes and loans. In three years, they will all have to hide from the police. But this is our financial business. We'll figure it out somehow. I'm worried what's going on here? When they stop killing each other and stealing and start working. To be honest, if such outrages occurred on my property, I would also be worried and I would try to sell it (the property) to someone as soon as possible if I found a buyer, of course.

I had to answer the question, since Torrelli was looking at me, apparently considering me personally responsible for everything that happens to his property.

"If you'll excuse me, I'll answer your question, sir, sorry, Papa Luigi," I began, glancing at Bill. With a movement of his eyes, he let me know that I could put the ball in play.

"When the CPSU," I continued, "decided to dismantle the Soviet Union for the sake of its own salvation and personal enrichment, fearing that it might collapse and crush them all, this

useful initiative found its response in the union republics for a fairly simple reason. During all the post-war years, I do not want to dig deeper, Moscow was engaged in direct and black racketeering in relation to the republics. Simplifying somewhat, we can say that practically all the money earned by the republic is forced to be given to the center for the right to breathe alone and not always for the right not to die of hunger. As you probably know, they exterminated their own people by the millions so that those who survived worked for them for a hard labor ration of bread. Their satraps in the republics were raised on a simple survival instinct. Either they will give everything they need, that is, everything to the last cent, to Moscow, or they will pay with their heads. When this regime decomposed so much that it was no longer able to carry out massacres, when the murderers were replaced by banal thieves, all the so-called Soviet republics represented by the Moscow communist satraps began to live a dream, how wonderful it would be not to pay tribute to Moscow, but all, pumped out of the people and stolen, to keep for yourself. In their dreams, they completely forgot about reality. About, say, that their wheat does not meet the requirements of the world market, that their cotton is substandard, that their oil is too dirty, and so on. They forgot that all refineries and processing plants are in the hands of Russia, and that they will never achieve a world breakthrough on their own. But when it came to "dismantling", they enthusiastically clung to this idea, without taking into account one more small circumstance. Their own satraps in the autonomies also did not want to pay tribute to them for a long time, but to leave everything to themselves and live on the bones of the people, like feudal kings. Abkhazia did not want to pay Tbilisi, Karabakh - Baku, Grozny - Moscow, and so on. In other words, the "dismantling" according to the domino theory began, which was decided to be stopped in the simplest way - by military means, which, in conditions of complete anarchy, could lead to a general big fire. Have I made myself clear enough, sir?

- Good deeds. Papa Luigi muttered and looked at Burson.

"Borukh," he said, "is it possible to untie this knot of anarchy in the country?"

"I don't think it's possible to untie it," Berson replied. - You can only cut it. We specifically created a system of anarchy so that we would not be hindered from working. Do you remember, Luigi, when Yeltsin was the chairman of the Supreme Soviet even during the existence of the USSR, he specifically passed a law that the president, referring to the then president of the USSR Gorbachev, did not have the right to dissolve the Supreme Soviet? And when he himself became president, this law hit him. I personally do not understand why we need to change the existing situation? Let them spin in a political impasse. It's only useful. It is in this position that we get the maximum profit. Why do we need any kind of power in Russia other than the power of the dollar?

"You have the soul of a petty shopkeeper, Boruch," Señor Torrelli remarked wearily. - Grab as much as possible and run away. In Palermo, everyone thinks the same as you. Therefore, it is absolutely impossible to work there.

Mr. Torrelli had never been to Palermo, nor had he ever been to Italy. His great-grandfather came to the States from Milan. But for some reason, he was always pleased to emphasize his Sicilian origin.

"I have to think about this huge market," Papa Luigi continued. - Think long term. What we are doing here now is economic debauchery. Today it brings fabulous profits, and tomorrow it will turn into some next world cataclysm, bringing only losses. Sorry, gentlemen, that I have to tell you common truths. But I wouldn't be a financier if I didn't feel exactly the moment when I had to write off \$100,000 to charity in order to save a hundred million. I assure you guys, we took everything we could from the chaos, This country has been living in debt for at least a hundred years. By and large, their old empire and their

The Soviet Union collapsed because they were bankrupt and were unable to pay not only debts, but even interest on debts. Not paying back their debts has become something like a national sport. I checked against old ledgers. As soon as the time comes to pay the bills, they are ready to destroy their own country, start a world war, exterminate their own people and the whole world, just not to pay. Then another rogue jumps out of the chaos to the pinnacle of power and begins to declare that he is not responsible for the debts accumulated by the previous swindler, who has either already been killed, or he fled to us, assuring that he would undoubtedly repay all debts and certainly it will if we help him seize power again. In short, I need a stable market and a stable government in this country.

- Which? Trokman inquired, frowning.

"As a good American and a Catholic," Luigi Torrelli chuckled, "I don't like reds. They are all thieves and swindlers.

"Understood," Bill nodded. "But I'm afraid it's not legal to do that anymore.

- Legitimate? Papa Luigi's face hardened. — Did you say "legitimate", Mr. Throckman? Do you think a lot about legitimacy in Chile, Paraguay, Congo, Thailand and other places where the dollar is threatened? Why should legitimacy be respected in this country that never knew what it was at all? Just because it has a large territory and a few rusted nuclear missiles?

"This country was until recently considered a superpower," Bill tried to object, "and the mentality of its people...

— The people? said Torrelli ominously. "There are no people here. A crowd of people who have endured the power of successive paranoid killers and greedy scoundrels cannot be called a people. These millions still need to be somehow turned into a people, without using fanfare and drums for this. Classical democracy here without your help will always lead to power paralysis and chaos. I need an authoritarian regime. Mildly authoritarian. It is for this purpose that I flew over the ocean and now I am wasting time in this palace of the giant gnomes. What do you say to that, gentlemen?

Trokman broke the silence:

"Some things, of course, can be done in the direction you are pointing," Bill said. "But everything, I am sure, will be done rather rudely. What will be the position of our President, Congress and public opinion? You also need to think about this. Remember how much firewood was broken in Chile?

"You bore me with your analogies, Willy," Papa Luigi sighed. You are thinking about problems that do not concern you at all. Leave it to me to take care of what the president has to say about any event that happens in this country. Of course, - a nod in my direction, - let him fly home and consult with the State Department. You, Willy, go to Moscow with the general and without details express my opinion to the right people. You, Boruch, go to Zurich and warn the gnomes there not to be greedy. Raise them on your shoulders so that they look beyond the horizon at least once in their lives;

In the ensuing silence, Trockmann allowed himself to light a cigar.

"Just please," said Mr. Torrelli, "do everything carefully." Without shooting and various things with general games. I have 43 branches in Moscow now. You can do everything quietly whenever you want.

At the same time, he looked at me again:

- Their army is now for whom?

"For myself," I replied. - It's completely broken. A couple of years ago, some opposing officers gathered in Moscow something harmful to the conference, thunderous speeches blazed something about the oath and the deceased Union. They were given a thousand dollars each, and they calmed down.

Do they like dollars? Papa Luigi's eyes grew warm. - It is very good that our dollar is loved everywhere much more than us.

- There are several elite units and military schools, which, in principle, are enough to control the situation in the main regions of the country. In addition, there is now...

I looked at Trokman. He gestured to Mia to shut me up. Which is what I did.

"If necessary, convert them to dollars," said Torrelli. Don't be stingy, it's important. Michelo," he turned to me, "I like you. I heard you're about to retire? Would you like to work for me?"

"A bodyguard instead of Giovanni?" I asked.

"We'll discuss that later," Papa Luigi promised. Where are you going to settle in the States?

Pat's green eyes flickered in front of me.

Probably in Boston. I replied. No, definitely in Boston.

"Very well," Torrelli stood up. "Thank you for your attention, gentlemen. God bless your efforts.

We were moving towards the exit when Papa Luigi motioned for me to stay.

"The mayor of this city," he asked, "he met me at the airport, a very nice man, do you know him?"

"This is one of the pillars of the new Russian democracy," I said. - An adherent of freedom and breakthrough, a close employee of the president.

"I thought so," said Papa Luigi. "Is there anything I can do for him and this city?" Anything to help?

"Yes," I confirmed. - He really needs money to complete the nuclear cruiser,

"Madonna," whispered Mr. Torrelli. Why do they need a nuclear cruiser now?

But I could see in his eyes that he had already given money for that as well.

XVIII

— What do you think about all this? asked

Trockman when we got back to the living room.

"I'm afraid it won't work," I answered sincerely. - Papa Luigi doesn't know Russia. This is not Chile or Congo. We have done the most optimal thing possible here: anarchy. This is what the Russian people have always instinctively aspired to, the existence of which Senor Torrelli so emotionally denied. No democracy is possible here. Either a terrorist dictatorship or anarchy. I mean center. And the regions can figure it out for themselves in the widest range: from emirates to farming republics like the Transvaal and Orange at the end of the last century. I believe that the salvation of this country lies in the reduction of the central government to the maximum possible minimum. The plowing president, interrupting this occupation for the sake of receiving foreign ambassadors. The soft authoritarianism that Luigi dreams of is nonsense. Any mild authoritarianism will become an iron dictatorship tomorrow, especially in the conditions of the incredible political and moral decay that Russia is now experiencing.

- Maybe early elections? Bill suggested.

- The situation in Russia now is such, - I continued, - that any experiments can be carried out, to which the three "power" ministers agree. Even two. It's not about that. Early elections can be held. But what will it give? Do you really think, Bill, that they will elect to their so-called parliament someone better than those who are sitting there now. Take a look at the map of this country, which we mistakenly used to identify with Moscow. In thousands of towns and villages lives an absolutely apolitical and reduced to a semi-animal state of the population. He will be driven to the elections and he will do what he has been doing for decades: he will again choose his secretary of the city committee, along with a couple of criminals. Such an audience will make up the new parliament, divorced by a dozen idealist democrats from the capital. No one will have time to come to their senses, as a new paralysis of power will come. And believe me, in this new parliament, the majority will again be captured by the communists, nationalists and the like. Remember that Hitler also did not undertake any coups, but came to power as a result of free elections. So why engage in unnecessary work, which can be very expensive and give absolutely no results, leading, at best, to what has already been achieved? Democracy, as one of the greats said, presents unlimited opportunities to those who hate it, and to those who fight for it, it poses only, sometimes insoluble, problems. I understand Mr. Torrelli. He wants to stop the gang rape of Russia and deal with this process alone. But he doesn't understand the situation. Only anarchy has so far opened before the Russians those paths that were previously tightly closed. They timidly, stumbling and looking around in fear, went along this road. Let them go further, and then experiment with the authorities and various early elections ...

Maybe a general? Bill muttered.

"Like Sevryugin," I suggested. - Here, even a decent general cannot be found now, who, having come to power, would not immediately bring the entire state treasury to his dacha.

"I share almost all your concerns and arguments," Trokman sighed, "but we must try. Papa Luigi senses the approach of chaos, and he is right: it could cost us much more. It is necessary to remove the thorn in Russia in the form of the old communist Constitution and re-elect the authorities. If they are bad, re-elect them too. At the same time, teach them not to shoot. Let Satan be nervous, seeing how we are converting his training ground into a training ground for democracy,

"At the same time," I put in, "each round of such exercises will raise a dollar, which is what Mr. Luigi needs.

"And not just him," Bill agreed. "But you talk about it like you don't like it.

"It never makes me happy when someone who is lying down is beaten," I confessed. "Apparently, I have worked in this country for too long. It affects the psyche. I want to get out of here as soon as possible.

"Yes," Trokman perked up. — Of course. Fly urgently to Paris. Inform our residency that we are starting Option C. Try to get everything done within a week and fly to Washington. I think that my boss and I will already be back home and submit the necessary report to the State Department and get the president's approval of the plan. You can fly out today?

"I want to see him, Bill," I said, not entirely confident. Nothing bad will happen if I leave tomorrow.

"Aren't you afraid he'll slap you?" Bill asked. We would be sad to lose you. I would like you, after a little rest, to return to Moscow, at least as an adviser.

"We've already talked about this," I said angrily. "And you, as far as I remember, agreed that it was time for me to go home. As for the fact that the Coyote will slam me, I don't understand what prevents him from doing this at any moment?

Bill looked at me strangely.

"I wouldn't go for anything.

He gave me his hand.

"I could stop you from doing this. But I won't. Go. But be careful. And straight to the airport. Contact me from the Paris station. Only, please, without your eternal things.

I promised.

Trokman got up and went out into the lobby, and I went to my room, where the car keys lay on the table. Klimov kept his promise. To my surprise, the car turned out to be a pickup truck with a Grocery sign on it. In the driver's seat, a green quilted jacket lay meaningfully. I took off my jacket, threw it on the seat, dressed in a padded jacket and moved the pickup truck towards the gate, where either Mr. Torrelli's Italians or Mr. Berkesov's Circassians were standing in semi-military overalls.

None of them raised an eyebrow, the gates silently parted, and I drove out onto a deserted road. Although several cars were parked outside the gates of the mansion, none of them moved. Having traveled several hundred meters, I made sure that there was no surveillance on me, and joined the flow of traffic following through the bridge towards Kamennostrovsky Prospekt ...

I parked a grocery pickup at the very front of the house where Ruanova lived and, as I was in a padded jacket, climbed the familiar stairs, without even bothering to check if the elevator was working or not.

The apartment was sealed.

Call cut off. The peephole is knocked out, and before it didn't seem to be there. I looked into it
- complete darkness.

I opened the door, which was unlocked. He entered the hallway, brightly lit, despite the fact that nothing could be seen from the landing through the hole in the viewing eye.

He stood in the doorway just as I expected to see him, looking at me with some kind of sadness, not that surprise.

"Hi, Coyote," I said, surprised at my calmness.

"Hi Mike," he replied simply. "Did you immediately realize it was me?"

"Of course not," I admitted. "I myself was baffled by this Coyote story. And I still don't fully understand. But when I saw Jeanne, I began to guess something. I gave my name to her so that she would remember something.

Did you know Jeanne? he asked in surprise.

"I knew, I didn't know," I laughed. "But you also inherited enough to be able to figure something out. We already live in the age of computers.

"You're a good professional, Mike," he praised me.

I silently swallowed the compliment. And, to refute his opinion of me, he asked;

"Did you kill the nuclear echelon guards?"

He looked at me as if asking if I was in my right mind?

"You mean the Israeli Uzi assault rifle?"

"No," I said. - Too many statistics. When necessary, they use English Mauser rifles to destroy villages, Walter pistols in Katyn, Colts in Guyana, and for some reason they decided to give Israel the honor of disrupting the most terrible crime of all possible. They have no logic. Especially now. They are simply accustomed to receiving dollars from the buyer, and from the seller, and from competitors ...

"It was a woman," he said, not listening to my reasoning. - She fired plenty of all the machine guns at the sleeping guards and at the walls of the car, then moved to the diesel locomotive, which was being driven ... In general, the old story.

He sighed and asked me:

"Maybe they still shot each other?" After all, this is exactly what was said in the order signed by Klimov. Or it was done by the machinist, whose name was ...

"Joseph Lee," I prompted. Everyone considered him Korean, and he received 1,000 dollars a day for his hard work. Pennies. He always regarded the Uzi as the best weapon of mass destruction. I thought he was joking...

"Yes," he agreed. - Therefore, Belov gave him this particular machine gun received from Nathan, where you and Klimov often met in the sauna.

— Belov? I asked, thinking badly.

"Belov-Kobanenko," Coyote confirmed, "lieutenant colonel of the GRU special forces. His real name is unknown, it seems, even to himself.

"He's dead," I said. — He was thrown into a pond somewhere on the outskirts of the city. I saw myself.

"You saw him pulled out of the pond," he corrected. - There is a big difference between throwing into a pond and extracting from it, which Caligula knew about.

"Yes," I laughed. - When we arrested him, it seems, the year before last, he said just that: "I know that I have someone else's last name, but I'm not supposed to know my own last name."

"That's why it's impossible to kill him," said Coyote.

"But he reacts to dollars as well as anyone else," I said with some defiance, like a child caught with a slingshot. And to change the subject, he asked:

Yitzhak is looking for you.

"Let him look," he replied. "It's none of my business.

"Even in your country," I dared to quip, "there is a separate department dealing with the Jews?"

"It's a little more complicated than you think," Coyote sighed. "Jews always want to jump out of time. It is not enough for a supnation to become strong. You still have to be good.

- Like us? I asked not very modestly. We feed the whole world, dress it, entertain and take care of it.

"You are very kind," he agreed, "you in particular, Mike. You killed Coyote, didn't you?"

"What was I to do? I hurried. "He learned too much about the 'dismantling' technique. Besides, this is not my initiative at all. I received an order...

"But the order was given on your recommendation," he clarified.

Are you judging me? I asked dejectedly.

"No," he said sadly. "I don't blame you. If only because you have no idea what service you rendered him. All I'm saying is that the way you solved the Coyote problem has been known for 50 centuries. Only the means have changed. And there was a hope that 50 centuries would be enough time to grow a little wiser. Come on do not talk about it. You are leaving?"

I did not understand what it was: a question or an order, but silently nodded.

- With the feeling of a winner? - he asked.

"I had this feeling in 1991, during the events you know," I admitted. - Now it is no more. Some other feeling. I can't figure it out. It's unpleasant: like I'm kicking someone. Someone lying in a heart attack on a dusty road.

But in your heart you are glad that it turned out that way.

It was no longer a question, but a statement.

— What would you like? I couldn't resist. "They wanted to destroy my country and the whole world. Do you remember, together with you, we flew in a helicopter over a tank range in Siberia. It was larger than Holland and there were tanks side by side. Not written off, but ready for battle. It was possible to plant the entire male population of the Earth in them. You know as well as I do what they hatched in their secret offices, don't you?"

"Children," he replied. - What can be demanded from children? They took their dangerous toys away, and

must be educated, re-educated. Mainly kindness.

Subconsciously, we understood this. I agreed. "Even in the harshest times, we fed and clothed them. I don't know how many times we saved them from all sorts of catastrophes. But our patience has run out...

"Mike," he said, "don't tell me stories about your kindness. You play your game clearly and mercilessly, and to your own advantage. You walked with a damp cloth over the surface when it needs to be scraped with alkali ...

"We'll never do that," I interrupted him. "The dollar and you should do it for us. After all, you are the commandant of the landfill?

- I? Coyote was surprised. "Have mercy, what are you talking about?" What polygon? What do you even know about me?

"I know something," I agreed. - You were an engineer. He graduated from the local Polytechnic Institute, was a climber. He was not interested in politics, he did not cooperate with the KGB. He liked to play preference and drink beer. Married. There were no children.

- How long have you known this? - although he was in perfect control of himself, it was clear that my confessions came as a surprise to him.

"About a year after the first contact with you," I explained.

- Did you dig it out? There was genuine surprise in his voice.

"Yes," I sighed at the memory. — The case helped me. I saw your photo in one house. And they told me your story. At first, I didn't believe it, of course. Then he put on the certificates and was convinced that "the reality is even worse," as reporters like to say.

"So you've known who I am all these years?" - he asked.

- Did you know? I asked. "Yeah, I still don't really know who you are. I believe in my pride that you are the same resident as I am.

He laughed.

"What I love you for, Mike, is that you always surprised me in one way or another. Well, I'll surprise you too. Do you know why I showed up here again and did all this improv with Coyote? I wanted to quietly and peacefully pick up Zhanna at last. Do you understand, perhaps, the reasons why she is still here? But I found out that you're on your way here with orders to kill Coyote, and I thought I'd get your attention...

"And the security services of five countries," I put in.

"It didn't matter, you understand," he replied. - I needed you. And that's why. Do you want to work with me? Think. Such offers are very rare. I need a good professional.

From somewhere it blew an icy cold. I felt chills, although I was in a padded jacket.

"Don't answer," he said. I see that you are not ready. It's because of Pat you met at the airport. It's a pity.

The cold air continued to rush in on me, as if I were standing under a broken air conditioner. Chills pierced my body in an icy stream.

"Goodbye," he said.

The light went out, the cold grew stronger. I tried to orient myself in the darkness, trying to find a way out by touch, and suddenly I heard a demanding knock right above my ear. I froze for a moment. The persistent knocking continued...

I felt some uncontrollable fear and even covered my face with my hands, trying to recover. Whoever we consider ourselves to be, we are pitiful physiological beings working on specific programs called instincts that do not give us the opportunity to look into the bottomless black abyss, from where it smells of icy cold.

Turning on the ignition, I drove along Ruanova's house, quickly suppressing the desire that had flashed through my head to go up to her apartment again. He suggested that I make a voluntary choice, but he could decide everything on his own...

I don't know if I did it subconsciously or not, but I directed General Klimov's grocery pickup truck to the gates of the old St. Petersburg cemetery. Leaving the ignition key in place, I took off my padded jacket, put it on the seat, took my jacket and got out of the car, slamming the door.

At the gates of the cemetery, I bought a bunch of flowers from some old woman and went through the fence. Near the old, hastily repaired church with a crooked cross, stood several old women in black shawls and wretched-looking old men. Apparently, I looked rather strange, because they all looked at me with frightened and wary eyes. Such views are constantly met in Russia and not only in the cemetery. The flowers in my hands probably calmed them, and I ceased to be the subject of everyone's attention.

I walked past the church along the central alley, remembering the path that I had traveled many years ago with bated breath in the false hope that I was wrong. I turned onto one of the side paths, which narrowed and led me to a thicket of an abandoned section of the cemetery, where in a thicket of lush weeds one could see the tombstones of old and new graves. I went straight through the thick bushes, looking at the tombstones. And finally found that

searched.

A shell with a small slab of pressed stone chips that has sunk into the ground, half-flooded, overgrown, without a fence. On the plate is a fairly well-preserved inscription:

Eremeev M.E.

TRAGICALLY DIE

AUGUST 26, 1965.

And below:

Eremeeva Zh.N.

1938–1965

Turns out she was ten years older than me. She committed suicide after the death of Misha, although she knew that this was strictly forbidden. But she could not live without him and was in despair that he had left alone. And this gave rise to such a bunch of problems that had to be solved for almost thirty years.

Scratching my hand on the sharp dry stems, I put the flowers on the sink and whispered a half-forgotten prayer that they taught me a long time ago, so long ago that those magical swords with which people tried to fight their way to full life had not yet rusted and turned to dust. freedom, not realizing that they are crushing the inner walls of the incubator. A baby in the mother's womb, armed with a knife, with which he tries to break out into the world ahead of time, ripping open her stomach from the inside. Excuse me. I was a bad son, and an even worse husband, and a completely useless father.

Raindrops falling on my bare head brought me back to reality. I stood a little longer over the grave of the unfortunate climber and his mentally unstable wife, looked at the low clouds driven by the western wind, at the dome of the old church with a new stainless steel cross visible behind the trees, and slowly walked away along the path ...

As I expected, the grocery pickup disappeared, replaced by a black Volga driven by Major Shepelev himself. He sat about as if he had no doubt that I would get into this car. Terribly unceremonious audience. They will also decide that I did a mailbox extraction before returning home, like in their cheap television series.

I opened the door and sat down next to the major: firstly, politeness demanded to say goodbye to Berkesov, and secondly, I couldn't get out of here on foot.

"Congratulations, colonel," I said, sitting down in an armchair across from Berkesov. He sat at the table, resting his chin on his clasped hands. Felix Dzerzhinsky looked at me behind his back with understandable reproach.

- What are you about? Berkesov did not understand.

— How about what? I was surprised. "About making you a general, of course! If you remember, I always predicted this to you.

"Thank you," he sighed, and apparently wanting to change the subject, he asked, "So you're leaving?"

"I'm leaving," I confirmed, sighing in turn.

- Forever? If that was the question, it was filled with hope.

"I don't know," I said honestly. "If I can get away with it, then yes. If not, then I don't know. But I wouldn't want to come back here again.

Why? Berkesov looked at me with surprise.

"Forgive me, colonel," I called him an old rank out of habit, "but it's very hard to work for you. The country is dead. A pile of stones. I felt like a Robinson who never managed to find his Friday. I yearned for human contact. It was even in Vietnam, but not here. I don't want to offend you at all, and why should we offend and be offended by each other. We have been working together for a long time, trying to resurrect what has been killed for centuries. Despite our mistakes, young grass began to grow in places through the dead stones. Do not trample it yourself and do not let others do it.

- For example, you? Berkesov asked, shooting me his investigative glance.

"We never trample grass," I disagreed. "We cut it sometimes when it seems to us that it is starting to grow too violently. We do not like dead land and lush thickets. We love civilized, cultural lawns. Dead earth and grass three human heights are extremism of the same kind.

"Something you have become too clever," Berkesov remarked irritably. - Speak in an incomprehensible way. Were you drawn to metaphors after the meeting on Stone Island and the visit to the cemetery?

"I understand your desire to find out what we agreed on in the Grand Duke's mansion," I smiled. "I have no secrets from you, Colonel. We have come to the conclusion that our experiment with imposing democracy in Russia has failed. There is no direct path from totalitarianism to democracy. Alas, the great theoreticians turned out to be smarter than us. We humbled our pride and confessed it to each other.

"So what now?" Berkesov looked at me warily.

"Honestly, I don't know," I said sincerely. I am a performer just like you. I told you this a hundred times. I can only quote you verbatim the words of my boss: "Let's turn Satan's training ground into a training ground for democracy." I had no idea at all that this meeting would be. You know that I came here because of the Coyote. It's just that events are moving much faster than we would like.

What about the Coyote? Berkesov asked. - Klimov told me not to deal with this issue anymore. He is completely given to you.

I was silent, wondering what to answer him.

"If you don't want to, then don't answer," Berkesov said. - I'm only interested in this from one point of view: was he in the city or not?

"I killed him," I said slowly, looking into the sparkling eyes of Iron Felix in the portrait, that is, over Berkesov's head.

On the one hand, it was the purest truth - before leaving home, I received an order to kill Coyote and carried it out, on the other hand, it was a monstrous lie. If I killed him, it was my cowardice and pettiness, which was expressed in the desire to sleep with Pat a few more times before physical death, which is inevitable.

Fear, mixed with joy and distrust, flashed across Berkesov's eyes.

"I've heard a lot about you, Macintyre," he said. And I talked to you a lot. In parting, I'll tell you: sometimes I completely disagree with your reasoning, but according to the results, you are a top-class scout.

What the hell is he talking about, I thought. - I still didn't have enough to listen to compliments from local policemen, as in Haiti. But at least they hoped that I would give them ten dollars for it.

"I mean it seriously," Berkesov blushed, as if guessing my thoughts. "I don't know what kind of weapon you used, but a concrete wall between the kitchen and the room collapsed in Ruanova's apartment.

"Yes," I confessed, "I always carry a sixteen-inch gun in my pocket.

He looked at me incredulously, and I understood his admiration: he sincerely believed that I had brought down the wall, fighting the Coyote like a battleship with coastal batteries. He wouldn't believe that I

learned about this wall from him, and he wanted more than anything in the world to know what kind of new weapon they came up with in Langley for their agents? I decided not to disappoint him. Although all human knowledge today would not be enough to understand something, I modestly answered Berkesov:

"I don't have the right to say anything yet. Somehow later you will know everything.

"And then you went to the cemetery," continued Berkesov. - to...

"To thank the Lord for giving me the victory," I laughed. "And it was very kind of you to send a car for me.

"Victory," I thought. "I have never suffered such a defeat as today."

But Berkesov was thinking about something else.

"Yeremeev," he said, looking off to the side, as if not addressing me. - Ereemeev Mikhail Ereemeevich, born in 1936, Russian, non-partisan, higher education. He died in August 1965 in the Pamirs, falling under an avalanche. The body has not been found. His wife, Ereemeeva Zhanna Nikolaevna, having learned about the death of her husband, committed suicide by throwing herself into the waters of the Malaya Nevka in front of her friends. The body was not found, photographs in the personnel records at their place of work could not be found due to the prescription of time. A survey of the few people who personally knew them, in fact, yielded nothing. In the archive of the society of climbers, which, one might say, does not exist, they reported that more than thirty people died along with Ereemeev. The house in which this married couple lived was demolished in the mid-70s during the new development of Nalichnaya Street and the embankment of the Smolenka River.

I understood why Berkesov was looking at the table. He read the operational report prepared for him about the Yeremeev spouses.

"And how long have you known all this?" I asked.

"Since your first visit to the grave," Berkesov raised his eyes. - You will laugh again, but we thought that you had a "mail box" there.

"I won't laugh," I replied. You should have exhumed the grave right away. (At that time, our mailbox was in Andropov's waiting room).

"We did it," Berkesov blushed. "The corpse of a baby of five months old is buried there, according to experts.

Berkesov was silent. I was silent too.

— What do you say to that? the general broke the silence. - You worked with him.

"You worked more with him," I retorted. - What can I tell you? I may know more facts than you. But I understand exactly the same. Don't think I'm that smart. I came across this story quite by accident when I worked at the Leningrad Consulate as vice-consul for culture. During one of the sad memory of the so-called "unauthorized contacts" with representatives of the cultural "underground" jointly created by you and us, I saw a photograph of Ereemeev on the wall. It turns out that he was once very famous among local preferans. I was told in general terms the story of his death and was shown the grave. I immediately reported this to our service line. This is far from the first such case that we record, but, of course, we cannot explain anything. Did you report it?

"As you understand," Berkesov spread his hands, "then I didn't

was doing. I just now found the necessary references in the archive. It can be seen from them that Andropov knew about this ... Dying, he ordered the liquidation of Yeremeev, but he disappeared ...

"Still," I thought. "Few people know that Andropov went crazy before his death and was carrying who knows what."

We both fell silent again. I do not know what Berkesov was thinking, but I recalled one conversation with Eremeev at the dacha in Dubrovo. It wasn't even a conversation. When Klimov and I arrived at Father Gudko's former home, we found Eremeev sitting in an armchair with a book in his hands and a bottle of beer on the table. Klimov immediately went to water the flowers, which he did with rapture, while I stayed with Misha on the veranda. While I poured myself a beer, Yeremeev suddenly began to read aloud: "Brave and proud, they dreamed of complete freedom. Possessing the highest technology and occult powers, they had the ability to demolish mountains, turn rivers, drain oceans, seas and lakes. Before anyone "or managed to intervene, they damaged a large surface of the inner wall of the incubator. The larvae of the mind, imagining themselves in pride and ignorance as the highest mind, left unattended for a second, almost destroyed the Mind itself. An infection, harmless to the Mind, penetrated through the damaged wall of the incubator, but fatal to the larvae, infecting them with black madness. Instead of preparing themselves for a future reunion with the mind, the larvae began to destroy each other with the same enthusiasm with which they had previously hollowed out the wall of the incubator. The catastrophe hung over the Mind itself, for it also cannot exist without properly reared larvae, as well as those without it. It was not possible to start a reserve incubator for various reasons, and it was possible to repair the existing one only from the inside. Meanwhile, the infection, covering about a sixth of the surface of the inner wall, began to spread further. The repair crews sent to the incubator have accomplished a feat that only great Time will allow to realize. Once they died, they died a hundred more times to save the day. Time inside the incubator counted down a thousand years before it was possible to finish the work in rough outline to the accompaniment of nuclear explosions already tearing the installation. But the continuity of the process was broken ... "

Are you into fantasy? I asked Yeremeev.

"Misha," he said to me, "namesake, have you never read this? Are you hearing these words for the first time?"

"Brave and proud, they dreamed of complete freedom. They wanted to escape from the bosom of the Lord and brought upon themselves black madness," I recalled the scorching afternoon of Salt Lake City and the words of a seemingly half-mad Mormon preacher. "We will die a thousand times, but we will save the Earth And the Evil Empire will fall!" Or maybe it was the scorching noon of Jerusalem, "I came to save the world and all of you! Lord, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing..."

What could I say about this to Berkesov? Nothing. He wouldn't understand me.

"We will die 1000 times, but we will save the Earth from the Empire of Evil and black madness," Berkesov said with a sigh.

I shuddered.

- I repeated your words, - Berkesov was surprised, - which you just said.

"But I didn't say anything," I protested. - How do you know these words?

"I don't know," Berkesov admitted. "I thought you said it. Or maybe it's from some samizdat book. Do you know how many I have read? I could already become an academic.

- Or maybe you heard this from Yeremeev? I asked.

"Perhaps," Berkesov agreed wearily. He passed his hand over his forehead and said, handing me a newspaper:

- Do you know that Orlov died?

- Yes, Klimov told me, - I took the newspaper and read: "Russian democracy has suffered an irreparable loss. The doctor of historical spider, corresponding member of the Russian Academy, retired lieutenant general Konstantin Pavlovich Orlov has suddenly died. The heart of a prominent scientist, a brave Chekist, has stopped beating, one of the most popular Russian entrepreneurs of the new time of economic reforms ... "

"Forgive me, Coyote," I thought, looking at the photograph of Orlov in the obituary. "I don't know what I'm doing either. But I know that you are better now than you were. me. You know we're not going to be apart for long."

The first under the obituary was the signature of General Sevryugin, and then Berkesov.

I knew that Orlov financed Sevryugin, and he came to St. Petersburg to report on his usual financial abuses. Giving Berkesov the newspaper, I asked:

- Did Orlov also fight against world Zionism, and therefore Sevryugin was the first to sign the obituary?

- Do you think that the Zionist conspiracy does not exist? What is all this fiction? Berkesov answered a question with a question.

"I don't know," I sighed, "maybe it exists. We all live in a world of our own illusions, Colonel, preferring to fight a shadow rather than a real enemy. I have a different approach to this problem. This conspiracy, whether it exists or not, does not bother me at all. Not for me, not for my country. I will say more, if such regimes as the regime of the Third Reich and yours fell thanks to this conspiracy, then I regret that I did not participate in this conspiracy.

Berkesov did not answer.

"Okay, okay," I said, looking at my watch. "With your permission, my general, I will go. I wish you good luck, Vasily Viktorovich. Whatever you say, it was a pleasure to work with you. And secure.

Berkesov got up from the table and gave me his hand:

Farewell, Mikhail Ereemeevich. Do not remember dashingly.

Shaking his hand, I felt that he thrust a piece of thick paper into my palm.

When I finally reached the consulate, with some apprehension, because of a bad feeling, I took Berkes paper out of my pocket and read a note written by a bold Green felt-tip pen: "Urgent. Before flying to Paris, at 19.00, come to the nine."

I can't give an accurate description of the "nine" here, because the "nines" are still used and I can give a lift to a couple of dozen people from both sides. I will only say that the "nines" are top-secret joint appearances of the CIA and the KGB, created in the days of Stalin and Roosevelt. As I said, no more than thirty people know about their existence in the world. "Nines" are also in the USA. Among other things, as I knew, death sentences passed by in absentia On the territory of the former USSR

"Nines" have not been used for 10 years, if not more. No one who knows about the "nines" has the right not to appear there if he is invited. For ignoring, you can pay with your head. The CIA also has its limits, beyond which there is not only no democracy, but no law at all. This is the logic of the special services.

My heart was pounding. I suddenly remembered something I had no right to forget: "THE PRESIDENT SIGNED BOTH PAPERS!"

His name is in the "nine" to eliminate!

I grabbed the telephone to warn Berkesov not to go anywhere. And put the phone down on the hook. The contact is broken, and I will never get through to him again.

I took a bottle of whiskey out of the safe, poured myself a glass and, without diluting it, drank it in one gulp.

I collapsed into a chair, lit a cigarette for the fifth time and tried to put my thoughts in order.

But they call me in the "nine", not Berkesov!

Berkesov invites.

So they want to eliminate me too. Or us together, which is quite logical. No, I will not go to any "nine". Get it right without me.

From zero o'clock today I am no longer a resident.

My codes and ciphers have been revoked, my magnetic computer penetration card is no longer valid. I no longer have the means to connect to the command, control and management system.

All! I am a private person. A CIA agent placed on temporary reserve on the eve of his permanent retirement. There is such an official wording.

I lied to myself, but sincerely believed that I was right. You can store a cosmic amount of information in your brain, you can have a next generation computer in your head, but the nerves and instincts will remain the nerves and instincts of a larva: physiological and pitiful.

I ordered Crump to secure me and drive the car back from Pulkovo. I threw a safety razor, a toothbrush, and half a bottle of whiskey into the case. He ordered the machines to be prepared. The plane to Paris took off at 21.10.

Decided! I will not go to any "nine". I'll fight off the difference in standard time, which I allegedly mixed up.

I will not go!!!

I drove the car to the airport, instinctively obeying the traffic lights. Luckily for me, as straight as the flight of a spear, the avenue worked on the "green wave" mode.

Approaching Victory Square, I looked at my watch, it was already 19.10.

In the rearview mirror, I saw Crump's car, who, along with two Marines from the consular guard, was following me. In the event that I am caught at the airport, they will at least testify, and Crump will be able to act as an official representative of the US consulate.

Nonsense! How can they get me? I have diplomatic immunity. If they are caught publicly, they will still have to be released.

Can they kill? Yes. Random gunfight. How many murders they have recently committed, innocently referring to the growth of criminal lawlessness! I know. Crump and the Marines will escort me to the plane's steps...

I let off the gas when entering Victory Square.

And then the thought took my breath away!

Turning around on the square, I drove the car in the opposite direction. Crump's car, cut off by traffic lights, helplessly flashed its brake lights...

Screeching to a stop, I jumped out of the car at the entrance to the "nine".

On the opposite corner of the street, I saw a small crowd of people surrounding a burning car, sprayed with foam from fire hoses.

With trembling hands, I turned the key, waiting an eternity for the electronic mechanism to engage the input synchroniser. I rushed inside. There was no one there. Round, like a ship's porthole, the window of the "nine" with half a meter of glass was knocked out with part of the wall. The wind blew into the room, blowing the polaroid curtain. On the table lay a silent pistol without a silencer, which for some reason was considered secret by the KGB. The entrance door, trimmed with teak, was pierced by two bullets at a height of about fifty centimeters from the floor.

Berkesov, like me, never carried a weapon with him. Who did he come here with a gun, and who did he try to put two bullets into? Why did he shoot in the legs? Who broke into the "nine", breaking through a wall stronger than the armor belt of a battleship, designed for the epicenter of a nuclear explosion, where the heads of the special services hoped to sit out in case the situation got out of control?

I felt chills, just like I did in Coyote's apartment.

They wanted to give me one last chance. Nothingness!

I understood the meaning of the bullets lodged in the doors. Nobody was shooting at anyone. It was a farewell salute. Salut Berkesov, who lost his usual composure from delight.

They were waiting for me and, without waiting, they left together.

Uncontrollable terror seized me. I have never experienced anything like this in my life. I don't remember how I ended up in the car again and how I got to the airport. I jumped out of the car and ran through the waiting room. Suddenly, I saw the face of the sergeant who had been banging his baton on the glass of the grocery pickup truck.

And then I remembered where I saw him!

This was the guy who at Sheremetyevo offered me to see his penis for five dollars.

If I had a gun, I would not hesitate to shoot him!

But there was no gun.

I darted to the side and for a moment I saw Crump's bewildered face. The Marines grabbed me. Two policemen with batons ran from the far end of the hall. Crump showed them his papers. They said something to him, pointing at me, and stepped aside.

Krump leaned over me and said something. As from another dimension, I heard the words: Berkesov... the car... shot... burned down... the car is empty...

I felt the pungent smell of ammonia ... Someone unbuttoned a button on my shirt.

— What happened, Mike? Crump's voice reached me again. - Are you okay?

— Frank? I asked. — Do you understand anything? He knew everything. So for whom did he bring the gun with him? For fireworks?

- What pistol? Crump didn't understand. - Boarding has begun. Leave. We worked together. There may be trouble.

He wanted to shoot me! I said, pulling myself out of the hands of the Marines. - Bastard!

At the airport of La Bourget, the staff of our Paris station was waiting for me in the car. They did not suspect any filth on my part, and therefore peacefully chatted and smoked. This allowed me, by switching to an anti-submarine zigzag, to bypass them and get to the taxi stand.

"Hotel Admiral Courbet. Near the river station," I said to the driver, sitting down next to him.

The Admiral Courbet Hotel was a specialized establishment for wealthy drunkards. There it was possible, without any interference, to go on a drinking binge for the ordered period. The hotel contained specialists who knew how to bring anyone out of hard drinking for half an hour, if the need arose. The hotel enjoyed worldwide fame. Clients even flew in from New Zealand.

The porter was exquisitely polite:

How can I serve you, monsieur...

"Python," I called myself the first name that came to mind.

"So, what do you want, Monsieur Poufon?"

"Python," I corrected.

— Excuse me, Monsieur Pithon. How can I serve you?

"I need a room without a phone, but with a bath," I said.

"And how long do you intend to stay with us, Monsieur Pithon?" the porter did.

"Three days," I said, "and then we'll see." Only that there was no telephone, TV and the like.

- We do not have telephones in the rooms, - the receptionist assured, - and we bring televisions at the request of customers. For a special fee.

"Well, fine," I said, "that suits me just fine.

"Just a minute, monsieur," an expression of sincere grief appeared on the face of the porter. "And what would you have me do if someone calls me and asks you?"

- Me?

- You, Monsieur Poo ... forgive me, Pithon. We are very strict with this matter, monsieur. Sometimes we

call even from the office of the president.

"Yes," I sighed, "I know that your establishment has a very high reputation. Well, if someone asks Python, then just call me.

"Thank you, monsieur. Your room is 207. Everything is already prepared for a three-day bliss.

I got water into the bathroom, undressed, took a glass, took out three bottles of rum from the drawer, which Admiral de Courbet allegedly adored during his service in Indochina, climbed into the hot water and drank three glasses in a row. And cried. I forgot the last time I cried. I cried and drank. Drinking and crying. A poster hung over the bathroom: "Suicide is a deadly sin!" I looked at this poster and drank. And poured again and cried.

I wept with contempt for myself. I chickened out, but he didn't. Moreover, he took a gun with him to give me another chance. They were waiting for me and left. And those two bullets intended for me, he, like a spit in my face, fired at the door.

I thought that they would come here, I hoped, although I knew that they would never come again, especially after today.

I got out of the bath and fell completely naked on the carpet. I felt like I was laughing. I fooled everyone because I'm smarter than all of them, damn them.

Suddenly, I heard soft footsteps in the hallway. My heart stopped beating. They are coming. They came back for me...

I jumped up in horror and hid behind the curtain of the window.

The door to the room slowly opened, and the receptionist appeared with a phone in his hands. Behind him was an Arab in a white coat and carrying a suitcase.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said the receptionist, peering behind the curtain and handing me the phone. "But you've been here for the fourth day now, and I allowed myself..."

- What is this? I recoiled in horror. And yelled away. pain. The damned Arab, passing from the other side, put a syringe into me.

"It's a telephone, monsieur," the porter explained in his sweetest voice. - You are asked to phone. Do not be afraid. We serve our clients.

At this time, an Arab scoundrel ran some kind of piece of iron along my spine. Dirty, vile maggots, crawling in the shit, what are you doing to me?

"Put it away," I said to the desk clerk. I will pay for three more days, for a year. Take that damned Arab away, mate. I want more...

I yelled as the Arab plunged another syringe into me.

"Monsieur Piphon," said the porter, "do not let our establishment down, which, perhaps, you will have to use more than once. You get a call from the American embassy, and a huge car is already waiting for you at the entrance, attracting unnecessary attention from the police, who are not always friendly to our sophisticated service.

And at this time the Arab stuck some odorous potion under my nose and gave me a crack.

"It's all right, guys," I said, picking up the phone. - You can get out!

"Monsieur de Python," I heard a voice in the receiver, "you used to have two days for your nonsense.

"I was younger," I replied.

"Your bosses have already bothered us with their calls," the voice chuckled. - Come quickly. While you were bathing in a buzz, a lot of interesting things happened in the world. A quarter-mile ciphertext awaits you.

I cursed, hung up, and went to the bathroom to shave and shower.

I guess I'm just really tired over the last week.

Saint Petersburg

March-September 1993